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NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢

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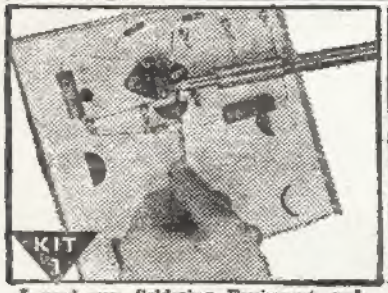
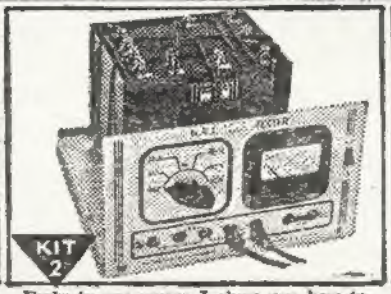
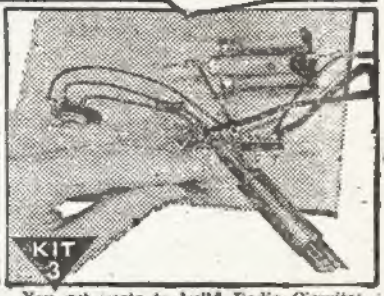


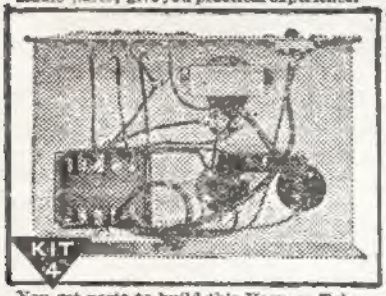
I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



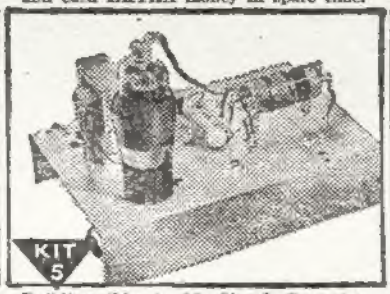
Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



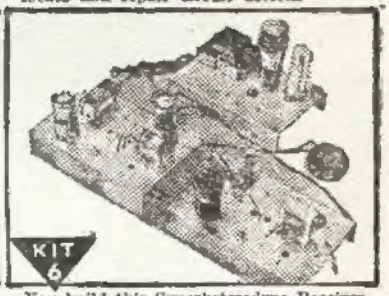
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



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Weird Tales

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NOVEMBER, 1945 Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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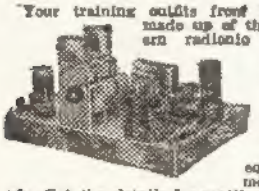

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ARKHAM HOUSE plans to publish in 1945 all books paper restrictions will permit, and our present schedule calls for the titles listed below. We are asking our patrons to subscribe in advance, and to be patient, for the difficulties of publishing are increased in wartime. In short: do not write to inquire about your orders without very good reason, for all books will be shipped out at once on publication, and if books do not reach you when expected, they are not yet in print. Patrons wishing orders acknowledged will please enclose a reply postal.
We will publish as many as we can in 1945 of the titles listed below, though one or two may slip over into early 1946. Your subscription now will be appreciated, so that we can determine the size of the edition of each title. SOMETHING NEAR, WITCH HOUSE, and THE OPENER OF THE WAY are now ready. We are also handling for Mycroft & Moran, August Derleth's collection of Sherlock Holmes' pastiches: "IN RE: SHERLOCK HOLMES," introduction by Vincent Starrett.

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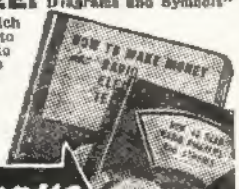

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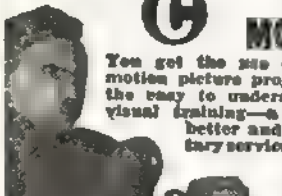

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Lost Elysium

STORM gathered ominously over the mid-Atlantic. Black clouds were boiling up across the western sky, and already the screaming wind was piling up great waves that battered at the little auxiliary yawl.

Brian Cullan, sole occupant of the little yawl, stood at its wheel and watched the gathering tempest in an agony of indecision and dread. Not dread for his personal safety, but fear that the storm might end the weird quest that had brought him to this lonely ocean waste.

"This storm will sink me unless I run before it," he muttered. "But if I stay, it *might* open the way to the Shining Land as it did before!"

Cullan's dark, lean young face was haggard as he looked down with tense hope at the ring on his finger. It was a strange ring, a worn, massive hoop of gold set with a curious prismatic crystal. But what he prayed for had not happened. The jewel was still dull, dead.

The storm was coming on with giant strides. Even under bare spars, the stout motor of the yawl could hardly keep it from swinging broadside to the climbing waves. He must flee at once if he were to escape the full fury of the tempest. But Cullan's agony of indecision suddenly ended in desperate resolve.

"I'll take the gamble! It's my only chance of entering Tir Sorcha again. I've tried everything else and failed."

And boldly he opened the Diesel's power

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

By EDMOND HAMILTON

and kept the little craft bucking directly into the storm, to maintain his position.

Brian Cullan had been cruising around this position in the lonely mid-Atlantic for days. Vainly he had been trying to force entrance back into the strange, alien world that by chance he had entered two years before.

That other time, just after the war ended, he had been flying back across the Atlantic to America and home. He had flown into raging thunderstorm and a strange thing had happened. The crystal of the old ring upon his finger had begun to glow weirdly with sparkling force.

The ring was an ancient heirloom in Brian Cullan's family. For his descent was supposed to be from the great Cuchulain, the legendary Celtic warrior-hero of two thousand years ago. And from Cuchulain had come down that strange ring which had always been called "The Unlocker."

The ring was a key, that under certain circumstances could unlock the gateway into an alien world. A world congruent with Earth but existing on a different plane of vibration, a world of unearthly beauty and horror that long ago Cuchulain and others had entered and had called Tir Sorcha, the Shining Land.

Flung into that weirdly different world, Brian Cullan had found that time in it was *different*. A year on Earth was but a day in the Shining Land. So that the twenty centuries since Cuchulain* visited that other world seemed but a few years to those who dwelt in it.

And the dwellers in Tir Sorcha were those whom the ancient Celts had worshiped as gods! The Tuatha De, the great race

Somewhere was that lost, golden land and a love worth the hideous danger of returning

whose chieftains Lugh and Dagda and others had been deified long ago by men of Earth, and who still lived and reigned in that other world of far slower time.

And among them—Cullan's heart yearned at the memory — was that princess Fand whom the great race had made guardian of the Gateway between worlds. Long ago, Fand had loved Cuchulain but had let him return to Earth. And when Brian Cullan came, to her he was Cuchulain returned, for a trick of inheritance had made him the double of his long-dead ancestor.

Cullan's eyes filled with tears that the howling wind and spray of the storm whipped from his cheeks.

"Fand, I swore to come back to you or die trying!" he cried into the roar of wind and waves. "And it's one or the other, now!"

For he had loved Fand, as he had loved no woman of Earth. In her faery-beautiful city Ethne, he had fought for her against her estranged husband Mannanan when that traitorous lord of the great race had sought to seize the Gateway to Earth for his own evil purposes.

He had fought and won, for Mannanan had died in the battle that wrecked his plot. But Cullan had lost too, had been exiled from the Shining Land and thrust back to his own world by the great Tuatha rulers who had decreed that none should come and go between the worlds.

He had come back to the drab, war-wearied Earth, but haunted by memory of that lost, golden elysium and the love he had left there. He had sworn to return to Fand despite the stern decree of the Tuatha lords.

NOW, after two years of preparation, Brian Cullan had come in the yawl to that spot in mid-ocean whence formerly his plane had been snatched into the other world. For days, he had vainly tried by the scientific means he had prepared to open that strange channel between the worlds of varying vibration. And all his attempts had failed.

This, now, was his last gamble. The way had been opened that other time by the unleashed electric forces of storm. It might happen again. If it did, the subtle scientific powers of the ancient ring upon his finger would take him through.

Cullan, clinging to the wheel of the bucking yawl, peered tensely at the crystal on his finger. "It *must* happen again!"

But the crystal of the Unlocker remained dead, mocking him. The jewel itself was not a door between worlds. It was only a talisman which could take him through if the door were opened.

The sky was now night-black, the howling gale raising mountainous waves that tossed the struggling yawl like a toy on their raving crests. Lightning had begun to spear blindingly across the heavens.

Blinded by flying spray, deafened by the roar of tempest, Brian Cullan fought fiercely to keep the yawl against the storm. Despair closed icy fingers around his heart, for now that the full power of the gale was unleashed, the little craft could not long survive.

Each time it dropped dizzyingly into the trough of the great waves, he managed miraculously to keep it from swinging broadside and foundering. But miracles could not go on forever. Cullan's hair bristled as he saw huger waves piling blackly and leaning forward to crush him.

Colossal hands seemed to snatch the yawl skyward, and as it hung for a moment on the crest with screw racing wildly, he knew this was the end. The whole heavens flared in that moment with dazzling lightning—

"The sign!" yelled Brian Cullan wildly. "The sign of the Gateway!"

The lightnings had whirled into a flaming, blinding circle in the sky over his head. A circle that seemed whirling down upon him.

And the crystal of the Unlocker on his finger was suddenly flaming! Scintillating with blazing rays of force that spun in a circle which was miniature match to the descending hoop of lightning above him.

Storm-lightning had momentarily opened the Gateway between the worlds of varying vibration, and the Unlocker's subtle aura of force would take him and his craft through if—

Crash! The yawl had dropped from the towering wave-crest to the surface of the sea, with a smashing shock that wrenched

its beams to shrieking protest, and that flung Brian Cullan hard against the rail.

He was half stunned, but he struggled to his knees. Then he froze, looking around him with wild surmise on his haggard face.

Golden, glowing mists were about him, a strange, sprawling haze. The yawl floated placidly on a smooth yellow sea, amid that unearthly radiance. Black sky, howling storm, raving waves, had all vanished.

Wild joy, exultation in hope long-deferred but now at last fulfilled, hammered in Brian Cullan's heart.

"Tir Sorcha! The Shining Land!"

II

GOLDEN, dreamy stretched the mists around him, stirred by the soft, warm wind into little twists of shining vapor that slowly swirled above the yellow sea. Forever hidden above the aureate haze was whatever sun lit this world. But through the sparkling, shrouding vapors there dimly bulked the outline of a distant island.

Brian Cullan felt a singing joy that thrilled his every nerve. He had fought fate and death and storm to return to this world, and his wild attempt had succeeded.

"Fand! Fand!" he whispered, and the name was like a jubilant prayer upon his lips.

He steered the yawl, its motor throbbing, toward the dim shape of the distant island.

This was a world of islands, he remembered. A strange, ocean world whose golden mists shrouded countless scattered isles that held wonders of beauty and terror unknown to Earth save in legend.

Cullan soon perceived that over the island ahead, vast-winged shadows hovered. Then he saw them more clearly as incredible, roc-like birds that were planing to a landing on the low green land.

"The Island of Great Birds!" he exclaimed. "I remember, now. And over there—"

Over there farther in the shining haze showed another isle that seemed covered by tall trees. But the trees were flowers, colossal blooms nodding and waving gently in the breeze.

The two remembered isles gave him his bearings. He turned the yawl and sent it throbbing away in a direction that was north by his gyro-compass. It was the way to the Isle of the Watersprout where was Fand's city Ethne, whose beauty had haunted his memory these two years.

"Two years?" thought Cullan. "But only two *days* have passed in this world, since Lugh forced me back to Earth."

Bitter had been that memory, of the hour when he had been exiled from this world and from Fand by stern decree of Lugh, lord of the Tuatha. But now the bitterness was dissolved in the joy of return.

Not even his knowledge that he was returning into Tir Sorcha in direct defiance of the warning of mighty Lugh, not even the penalty of doom he risked, could temper his joy. Somewhere here he and Fand would find chance for happiness, however brief.

Cullan could not measure the passage of time as the yawl sped north and north. It might be near nightfall but he had no means of guessing. Almost tremulously, his eyes strained into the mists ahead. Then at last, the island of his hopes took slow shape.

It was the Isle of the Watersprout, a low green hill rising from the yellow sea. A deep bay indented its southern coast, and above that bay climbed the shimmering structures of the faery city Ethne.

Most wonderful was the giant geyser of water that gave this isle its name. It was a colossal watersprout that sprang perpetually from a pit on the north shore and curved obliquely across the whole island to thunder down in a ceaseless cataract into the bay below the city.

"Ethne at last! And Father there, hoping and waiting for me—"

Brian Cullan's pulse hammered as he sent the yawl speeding into the bay. Loud in his ears now was the unending, booming thunder of the falling watersprout, whose maelstrom of currents he gave wide berth.

The battered little yawl glided into the bay on throttled motor. Ahead lay the ancient yellow stone docks of Ethne, and from them climbed the streets and elfin buildings of Fand's city.

Cullan saw that remembered beauty through blurred eyes. Poised beneath the rushing rainbow of water that arched the sky, Ethne was a city of dream. Its buildings were shimmering spheres like iridescent

bubbles, rising in breathtaking loveliness to the highest cluster of bubble-domes that was Fand's palace.

Suddenly, Cullan's wild elation checked a little. The city was strangely still, strangely *silent*. There was no sound but the distant boom of the falling watersprout, and no figure moved in the streets of shimmering spheres. He could see none of the fair-haired Tuatha lords and ladies, none of the dark slaves who had served them.

Fear grew swiftly in Brian Cullan's heart as he brought the yawl to the docks of worn yellow stone. He moored it hastily between the slim, burnished metal boats that floated here. Then he leaped quickly up onto the dock.

"Good God!" His exclamation came from lips stiffened by horror.

THE dock was littered with slain men. Most of them were Tuatha warriors, tall, fair-haired men in silver mail and helmets, lying with their glittering flame-swords still shining in their hands, their bodies blasted and blackened where enemy swords had touched them.

But among them lay also many of those enemy warriors who had died fighting them. These were dark, stocky, brutal-looking men in black armor, men like the dark slaves whom the Tuatha had owned. There had been an invasion and battle here in Ethne!

"Fand!" cried Cullan agonized. He ran up the sloping streets toward the highest bubble-palace.

Lost now on him were the beauty of shimmering domes and gorgeous gardens. Faery Ethne was a silent city of the dead. There were corpses everywhere in the streets, mostly Tuatha but no small number of the dark warriors.

Cullan remembered as he ran what Fand had mentioned, that their slaves were prisoners taken in war with the dark, deadly enemies of the Tuatha, the Fomorians who dwelled far northward in this world.

The Fomorians? The mysterious, malign race whose memory lived in Celtic legend as lords of evil who struggled against the Tuatha gods? They had been here in Ethne, had slain every soul. But Fand?

Wild with dread, Brian Cullan reached the palace and burst inside. In here, in the great central hall that was like the interior of a white pearl, the dead Tuatha warriors were thickest. And out on the terrace where Fand and he had declared their love, and in the wondrous gardens below it, other dead bodies of the handsome Tuatha folk lay sprawled.

Cullan searched frantically through the silent halls of death, but could not find Fand's body. He stood, wild with doubt and dread, feeling a ghastly loneliness in this still city of death.

Cullan whispered through dry lips. "If those dark devils killed Fand—"

He stopped and whirled. A slight sound had reached his ears. Were there *still* some of the Fomorians here?

Cullan stooped quickly and snatched up a flame-sword from a dead warrior. He knew the weapon from previous use. As his fingers closed on its hilt, its slim blade glowed with shining force—force released from the condenser-chamber in the hilt, that would blast any living thing touched by the blade.

He listened again, standing ready with the flaring sword in his hand, his lean, dark face taut and terrible. Then he went toward the heap of dead on the great stair. From there had come the sound.

A man in that heap of corpses was stirring feebly. It was a tall Tuatha warrior, whose face was on one side blackened and scorched by the grazing touch of a flame-sword.

Brian Cullan knew this man. It was Goban, captain of Fand's guards, a man at whose side he had fought against Mannanan's plotters two years—two days, here! —ago.

With fierce impatience, he raised Goban to sitting position and sought to revive him. The Tuathan, he saw, had been stunned by the glancing touch of a flame-sword and left for dead.

Now, he opened his eyes.

"Cuchulain!" cried Goban, looking wildly up into Cullan's face, and calling him by the name all the Tuatha had called him because of his resemblance to his long-dead ancestor. "Cuchulain, you've come back! But too late!"

He choked the last words out in a groan, looking around the corpse-littered palace.

"Goban, what has happened here?" cried Cullan hoarsely. "Where is Fand?"

He spoke in the Tuatha language, so like the ancient Gaelic, that he had learned here beforetime.

"The Fomorians have her—Tethra's dark warriors have taken her to black Mruun in the north!" groaned Goban. "They slew all here but me, and I should have died too."

Cullan's blood iced with dread. Fand a prisoner of the deadliest enemies of the Tuatha, the dark Fomorians whose evil had been legend even in Earth for ages?

"It was that traitor Mannanan's doing," said Goban thickly. "The cursed one who was once Fand's husband."

"Mannanan?" cried Cullan. "But he was killed two years ago—two days ago, by your time—when we smashed his plot to seize the Gateway."

"Aye," said Goban, "but it seems now that Mannanan's plot was not really his own. He was but a pawn in the hands of the Fomorians. Those black devils were the ones who really coveted the Gateway, so that they could go through into your Earth

"And when Mannanan's plot failed, Tethra's black horde acted quickly. They came to seize the Gateway mechanism and Fand, who is its guardian and knows the secret of its opening. They poured into Ethne last night from hundreds of boats and slew all in the city. They pressed the last of us into the palace as we sought to defend Fand."

Goban's eyes lighted fiercely. "You should have seen her, wielding sword with us like a tigress against the swarming dark ones. And as she fought, she cried, "If Cuchulain were but with us still!" That was all I heard before a sword grazed my face, and I fell stunned."

Brian Cullan's heart was bursting with wild emotion. And from his lips there broke a sound of rage that was almost a snarl.

THAT strange resurgence of ancestral personality, of ancestral memory, that once before had made him Cuchulain reborn, was waking in him again.

"We'll not stay here wailing her loss!" he cried. "We'll follow northward after them, even to Mruun!"

The red rage was creeping ever stronger across his brain, the terrible personality of the ancient Hound beginning again to dominate his maddening mind.

To have lost Fand, by merely hours! To have spent those long months of toil and danger and deadly risk to win back to the Shining Land and her, only to find himself too late!

"Wait, Cuchulain!" pleaded Goban. "We two could do nothing against all the Fomorians in black Mruun. The Tuatha of all the isles must be told of this. I must call, Lugh, lord of the Tuatha."

"Why didn't you call when danger first threatened?" Cullan demanded savagely.

"There was no time!" Goban protested. "The Fomorians burst in upon Ethne like a flood, a wave of death that rolled upon us in moments."

Goban rose unsteadily to his feet with Cullan's help, and staggered unsteadily across the hall to a pedestal on which was mounted a nest of coencentric crystal globes. He peered intently into the globes.

Light grew inside the coencentric crystals. Cullan knew he was witnessing some of the alien science of the Tuathans, an ancient science transcending the younger one of Earth.

"My thought is reaching through now to Lugh and Dagda," Goban whispered. "They will use the shape-sending to come here at once."

Suddenly, magically, two men appeared there in the death-littered hall beside them. Two tall Tuathan lords, one of them a giant.

The older man was Lugh, king of the Tuathan race, he whom the Celts of old had deemed greatest of gods—a man grave and gray with age, with somber, wrinkled face and piercing eyes. The other man, a huge, fierce-eyed giant, was burly Dagda, warrior-lord of the race.

Cullan knew that he was not really seeing the two Tuatha lords. These were but images of them, hurled across distance by the "shape-sending" science of Lugh, images that could see and speak and wield certain powers.

"What reason for this urgent call—" Lugh began to Goban, and then checked himself as he saw Brian Cullan. His face grew stern with wrath. "You have returned,

outworlder? Did I not warn you the penalty was death if you violated my decree and came back into this world?"

"Lord Lugh, look at these dead!" boomed the startled voice of giant Dagda, who had glanced across the corpse-strewn hall.

Goban spoke hastily. "The Fomorians have been here! They have taken the princess Fand and slain all others here but myself."

Lugh's face stiffened, almost as though in dread, as he heard Goban's swift tale. He cried, "What of the Gateway mechanism?"

I do not know but I fear they have taken it also," stammered Goban. "I was struck down here, and Cuchulain revived me when he came."

Lugh and Dagda—or their images—glided swiftly up the stair to the roof of the bubble palace. Cullan followed hastily with Goban.

He had been up here before. In the recess on this roof, he remembered, was situated that strange mechanism of other-world science which could be used to open the Gateway to Earth at will, and of which Fand was guardian.

BUT the mechanism was gone. That wonderful device of spinning crystals had been lifted from its bed, which now gaped empty.

"The Gateway in the hands of Tethra's Fomorians!" whispered Lugh. "It is what we have always feared and guarded against."

"They cannot operate it without knowing its secret," pointed out big Dagda. "And only Fand, beside yourself, knows that secret."

"Aye, but they have Fand," Lugh said somberly. "And Tethra's craft and tortures will surely win it from her in time."

He brooded for a moment. Then he told Goban, "Come at once to our citadel in Thandara. Great things impend, for now I think our long struggle with the dark ones of the north is rushing toward its climax."

He added, looking sternly at Brian Cullan, "Come you too, outworlder. It may be that fate itself has brought you back to this world against my decree, to play a part in our final war with darkness."

"Hell take all your wars and orders!" blazed Cullan. "I'm going after Fand!"

Lugh's eyes fixed him freezingly. "It may be that you will go, but it will be as I direct. Obey me, outworlder!"

He and Dagda, or their images, abruptly vanished. Cullan stood torn with indecision as Goban begged him to obey the order.

"Alone you could not even find black Mruun of the north," Goban insisted. "The lord Lugh's power only can recover Fand now."

That consideration was what impelled Brian Cullan finally to obey, despite his wild impatience. He followed Goban out of the palace and down through the silent, deathly city to the docks.

He was moving toward the yawl, when Goban objected. "That outworld craft of yours looks far too slow. We go in one of our own boats."

Cullan knew the tremendous speed of the slim, undecked metal boats of the Tuatha. He dropped into one after Goban, who went to the stern and touched the controls of the box-like generator of atomic power.

White fire jetted back under water from the stern, and the slim craft leaped out through the harbor like a frightened horse. Avoiding the thunderous falling waterspout by a swift turn of the tiller, Goban sent the boat skimming the yellow swells due westward through the golden mists.

The Tuathan captain seemed feverish with excitement over Lugh's promise of final war. But Cullan's mind could hold only one thought—memory of Fand in that last moment when she had clung to him and he had promised to return.

He had no eyes, in his agony of spirit, for the islands that took form in the golden mists and dropped behind them. The Isle of Silver with its argent rocks and burnished beaches, the strange Isle of Fire whose uprushing red flames glowed infernal through the haze, the other, farther isles that he vaguely recognized—he was blind now to their wonder.

The golden mists darkened as night began to fall. The slim boat rushed on and on over the smooth yellow swells. Then far ahead in the dusking mists there loomed a larger island. The bubble-like domes of its city surrounded the shimmering, lofty spires of a mighty citadel. Lights were

shining there, many boats moving, in feverish activity.

"Thandara, citadel of the Tuatha lords and heartland of our race!" Goban was crying to him. "It wakes for the last war with the Fomorians."

Thandara, fabled citadel of the old Celtic gods! Cullan, crushed by his dread, could feel only a numbed wonder as they rushed toward it.

III

TUATHAN warriors were already coming from other islands, as was evidenced by the many boats speeding into the harbor of the city. But Goban steered their own racing craft past the harbor, directly toward the point where the sheer, shimmering outer wall of the great citadel rose from the water edge.

There in the face of the wall was a watergate opening directly into the citadel. In the deepening dusk, Goban deftly maneuvered their craft through the opening and down a water tunnel into a little interior harbor beneath the great structure. Here a sourceless yellow light illuminated a dozen other metal boats chained to a stone quay.

On the quay waited a giant figure in silver mail and helmet. Cullan instantly recognized Dagda's craggy, massive face and fierce eyes.

"The lord Lugh awaits you," he boomed. "Already word has gone out to every island of our folk, and soon all will have gathered here."

"To go after Fand?" Cullan asked with feverish hope.

Dagda looked at him solemnly. "You may see her sooner than you think, outworlder."

They followed the burly giant up coiling silver stairs, through shining, iridescent corridors and chambers of soft, sourceless light. Everywhere in the citadel they heard running feet, babel of excited voices, stir of intense activity.

The Tuathan giant led them at last into a high chamber that was not large. Around its pale rose-tinged walls stood implements and instruments of the Tuathan science, their purpose unguessable to Cullan. And here stood Lugh, straight and spare in his mail, his somber face darker than ever as he listened to Goban's quick elaboration of his tale.

"Aye, it is plain enough," Lugh said, finally. "Tethra has long coveted the Gateway. And when his plot to gain it through Mannanan failed, he struck directly and took both it and its guardian."

"What will they do with her? They'll not kill her?" Cullan asked tensely.

"Not until they have wrung the secret of the Gateway from her," Lugh said darkly. "And then—then at last Tethra and his evil horde will be free to go through into your Earth."

His voice deepened as he continued. "It is why we Tuatha long ago closed the way between worlds. Your people would be defenseless against the dark science of the Fomorians. Once before, ages ago in your time, they broke through into Earth under Tethra and began conquering your primitive races.

"We Tuatha forced the Fomorians that time to return into this world. And soon after, when the men of Earth revolted against our own wise rule, we returned ourselves into this world and closed the Gateway so that the Fomorians could not again invade your world."

Lugh's face was heavy with memory. "Since then, for many years of our time and for many ages of yours, we have kept the Gateway closed. Only a few times, when the forces of nature happened to open the Gateway momentarily, have any from Earth come through. Your ancestor Cuchulain was one such, and it was because Fand gave him that ring you wear that you in turn were drawn into our world by such a chance opening of the way.

"But now the mechanism of the Gateway is in Tethra's hands. And when he forces its secret from Fand, he and his evil race will invade your world. I tell you that your folk of Earth will be defenseless before them! Your weapons of crude material science will be in vain, and the Fomorians will fasten an evil and hideous tyranny on all your race!"

Brian Cullan was chilled. He felt a fear such as he had not felt on that former occasion when Mannanan had plotted for the Gateway.

MANNANAN'S traitorous followers had been few, and whatever their powers he had not felt that so few could represent real danger to Earth. But these dark hordes of whom Lugh spoke, armed with inhuman powers and sciences, pouring through into an Earth already battered by war—

"Then the only means of averting that disaster is to get Fand away from Tethra's grasp before he can secure her secret!" he argued.

Lugh looked at him steadily. "You love Fand, do you not? It is why you returned to this world against my decree?"

Cullan answered boldly. "I do love her, and it is why I returned. You can kill me, I know, but I'll not go back again to Earth!"

Dagda, the giant, uttered booming appreciation. "This outworlder has courage, Lugh! Let him stay, we can use him in this fight."

Lugh was looking strangely at Cullan. "Yes, we can use him," he said slowly. "Fate itself has brought him back to use against Tethra. But let him not complain later when he learns all the tricks of fate."

To Brian Cullan there seemed something hidden, something ominous, in Lugh's words. But he was past caring for premonitions now.

"I'll complain at no risk or danger, if I can stay and fight my way to Fand!" he cried.

"We are going to Fand now," Lugh said unexpectedly. "In a few minutes you shall see and speak to her again, aye and to Tethra too in his castle in dark Mruun."

Cullan was astounded. "In a few minutes? But Goben says that Mruun lies far in the cold mists of the north?"

"We shall not go by ordinary means, this time," Lugh said. "You go with me, for I have a reason. But first, put on Tuathan mail."

Mystified, Brian Cullan discarded his clothes and donned the silver mail and helmet that were ready. When he had done so, he glimpsed himself in a mirror. His helmeted, dark head and mailed figure looked strangely different to him, from his former self.

"It is well," muttered Lugh, eyeing him. "You are indeed exact counterpart of your ancestor Cuchulain."

He led Cullan toward a looming device in a corner, a hollow copper cube atop which were mounted queer, shielded instruments.

Cullan began to understand. "Then only our *images* are to go? As you and Dagda came to Ethne?"

Lugh nodded. "Yes, we go by the shape-sending. This machine can fling a simulacrum of our physical bodies far and fast across any distance, and so we shall enter Mruun. And then—we shall see."

Cullan sensed again that hidden purpose in the Tuathan king's words, that mysterious purpose that somehow concerned himself. But he was too desperately anxious to see Fand again to question.

He followed Lugh inside the hollow copper cube. The Tuathan king touched and turned a gnurled knob upon the wall. Then from walls and floor and roof of the cube, blinding light seemed to explode upon them.

Brian Cullen reeled. He no longer felt the floor under his feet, but felt as though he were being hurled headlong through howling darkness. Vaguely, he felt Lugh's arm steadying him.

"We approach Mruun!" Lugh's voice reached him. "Now keep close behind me, and speak not until I have spoken."

Cullan seemed to himself to be hurtling behind Lugh swifter than thought, through cold, mist-shrouded night over heaving ocean. He knew that it was only his image that was so traveling, only a simulacrum of himself flung out by the Tuathan's deep mastery of atomic science.

Yet it seemed he, the *real* Brian Cullan, who was thus rushing at nightmare speed over the night-shrouded sea. And ahead of them, dooming up with incredible swiftness, towered a great island.

SHROUDED in cold northern mists, the stupendous crags of this island rose like black battlements of giants. Up there on the heights was a squat, dark, ancient city of vast extent, dominated by the massive, ebon castle that perched on the highest cliffs.

"Black Mruun, the chief isle of the Fomorian race," came Lugh's voice. "Remember, keep behind me as we enter Tethra's castle."

They were rushing up through mist and

night toward the black and massive pile. Cullan glimpsed dark, mailed Fomorian warriors on its walls, warriors who cried out and pointed at them.

Then he and Lugh were rushing *through* the thick stone walls of the castle, as though they did not exist. He had flashing glimpses of a labyrinth of dusky corridors and levels, as they drove through them.

Then, suddenly, their rush slowed and stopped as he and Lugh entered a vast, vaulted black room filled with strange, ocher light.

"The throne-chamber of Tethra," whispered Lugh, from in front of Cullan, "Aye, and there is he, and Fand."

At the far end of the room upon a throne of carven black stone flanked by mailed guards, sat Tethra. He was a man past middle age, dark like all the Fomorians but handsome and with something in his mocking face that seemed vaguely familiar to Cullan.

Facing the taunting gaze of the Fomorian ruler stood a slim, erect white figure at sight of whom Brian Cullan's heart jumped.

"Fand!" he whispered chokingly.

It was Fand as he remembered her, slender in her starwoven white gown, her dark hair bare. Her green eyes were brilliant with defiance, her dynamic white face stiff with loathing, as she faced Tethra.

But a moment that tableau held for Cullan to witness, before it was interrupted.

Into the throne-chamber raced Fomorian guards.

"Lugh and another have come! Their images rushed through the wall into the castle—"

But Tethra was on his feet before they could finish, glaring swiftly around the throne-chamber. He became rigid as he glimpsed Lugh gliding forward with Cullan close behind him.

"Lugh's shape-sending science!" exclaimed the Fomorian king. "Fear not, my men! I expected it and have prepared against it."

As he spoke, Lugh was swiftly moving his hand. From a heavy bracelet-instrument on his wrist, bolts of shining force like living lightning darted toward Tethra.

But those dazzling bolts withered, faded and vanished in the strange ocher radiance that filled the room. And Tethra laughed, his dark, mocking face triumphant.

"Said I not I was prepared?" he taunted. "Not thus easily do you catch me, Lugh. The shape-sending trick will not avail you now."

"The Tuatha know other tricks," Lugh said ominously. "You hover on the brink of an abyss, Tethra. Send Fand and the Gateway back to us or it is war Tuathans and Fomorians that means your death."

TETHRA laughed mockingly. "Will threats win that war for you? You are already defeated and you know it, Lugh. Long have you kept us barred out of that Earth from which you drove us. Now we go back there, for now we have the Gateway and soon we will have its secret."

Fand spoke swiftly in her silver voice. "They will never have it, lord Lugh! Fear not that any torture can force it from me."

"There are tortures of the mind that can transcend the terrors of the flesh," Tethra said smoothly. "And I know how to wield them, Fand."

"Aye," said Lugh darkly, "there are tortures of the mind. But two can play at using them, Tethra."

"Bring on your forces and weapons if you so dare," Tethra challenged contemptuously. "My warriors have long desired to slay you and your lords, including that hulking Dagda who now skulks behind you."

"It is not Dagda who is behind me," said Lugh quietly. "It is one who is not of the Tuatha at all."

And Lugh's image suddenly moved aside, revealing Brian Cullan's mailed figure to their gaze.

Tethra leaped up like a man stricken by appalling force. For a moment, as he stared at Cullan, his face was livid.

"Cuchulain!" he cried hoarsely. "Cuchulain, here from the outerworld!"

And from Fand came a glad, silver cry. "Cuchulain returned! I *knew* you would come back!"

She ran forward with wild gladness in her face, as Tethra still stood rigidly, stunnedly staring at Cullan's image.

Lugh made a sudden movement. To Cullan, the whole throne-room seemed suddenly to vanish as he was withdrawn from it with

incredible swiftness. He felt himself whirled back through darkness, and suddenly was standing again in the copper cube in Lugh's chamber at Thandara.

He stood unsteadily, still wild with emotion at his glimpse of Fand and her peril, as Lugh briefly told Dagda and the other of their glimpse of her.

Cullan interrupted, his voice hoarse. "We've got to do something to get her out of there, quickly!"

"We will," Lugh said quietly. "Tethra knows now that I have weapons against him."

"That devil didn't fear your weapons," Cullan said harshly. He added, puzzledly, "Though Tethra seemed almost to fear when he saw *me*, seemed to know me. Yet he has never seen me before."

"He mistook you for your ancestor Cuchulain—and he knew Cuchulain long ago when he and his Fomorians invaded Earth," said Lugh. The Tuatha king added, broodingly, "And seeing you made Tethra fear, indeed."

Cullan was too agonized by apprehension for Fand to ponder the dark mystery that he sensed again behind Lugh's words.

"We go to Mruun at once, physically and with weapons?" he cried tensely.

Lugh shook his head. "Not yet. The hosts of the Tuatha are not yet gathered. And I have still a weapon to use against Tethra before we join final battle. But it will take time."

"Time? There is no time!" Cullan retorted passionately. "If you and your warriors won't go, I'm going to Mruun alone!"

He turned to leave the chamber. But giant Dagda grasped him, and held him like a child despite his raging resistance.

"Lock him up," Lugh ordered curtly. "And you guard him, Goban. He is valuable to us for he is part of my plan against Tethra."

Struggling furiously, Cullan was carried bodily out of the chamber and down a corridor. Dagda tossed him into a small room, not unkindly.

"Be not so impatient, outworlder," boomed the giant as he shut and locked the door. "There'll be battle enough for all of us, soon."

Brian Cullan heard the huge Tuathan stride away, leaving Goban on guard outside the locked door. He stood in the small, yellow-lit room, trembling with frustrated rage and dread.

There was a tiny window. He went to it, looked out feverishly into the night. Diffused silver radiance now streamed down through the mists, from moons somewhere above the haze. The unreal light washed the gardens and bubble-buildings below this high citadel of Thandara.

Out in the harbor of the city he could see slim boats streaming in through the haze, in numbers. The Tuathan warriors were gathering from all their isles for war.

Cullan gained no hope from the sight. By the time this host was ready to go northward, it would be too late to save Fand from torture and death.

IV

CULLAN turned back from the window, his fists clenched and his dark face savage in the soft yellow light.

"I'll not be locked here like a child while Lugh spins mysterious plots. If they won't go to Mruun, I will!"

But how? How escape from this room, from the citadel? The window was too small, the door locked. There was only one possibility.

He went to the door and called through it. "Goban, I want you to come inside. I give my word not to try to overpower you."

Goban's voice came doubtfully. "I do not doubt your word, Cuchulain. But—"

"Man, the princess Fand's life hinges on it!" Cullan cried.

That swept aside Goban's doubts, as he had known it would. The captain of Fand's guards, like all her warriors, had been fanatically devoted to her. Goban unlocked the door and entered the room.

Cullan spoke rapidly. "Lugh told you that we had seen Fand a prisoner in Mruun. But he did not tell you of all her peril."

Goban's face blanched as he listened to Cullan's tale of hearing Tethra threaten the Tuathan princess with imminent torture.

"The devils of Fomoria!" raged the captain. "If they do that before we get there—"

"They *will* have done it before your host

arrives," pressed Brian Cullan. "Unless a few men, unless you and I, go ahead with all speed to Mruun and snatch Fand away from them first."

Goban gasped. "You and I go alone to black Mruun? It would be useless, mad."

"We would have a chance," Cullan insisted. "Tethra was startled, shaken, when he saw me. I think he fears me, or rather, Cuchulain. And I think we could secretly enter his castle. I saw all its interior ways as I went through it with Lugh in image."

The Tuathan captain hesitated, torn by his throbbing loyalty to Fand and his larger fealty to Lugh.

"The lord Lugh would slay me for breaking his command," Goban muttered. "But I will do it, Cuchulain! Better that than to let the princess die without attempt to save her!"

His decision made, Goban planned swiftly. "We can leave the citadel only by the way we came—the boats below. Wait, while I see if the road is clear."

Brian Cullan waited in tense impatience for minutes before Goban returned. The Tuathan captain handed him a flame-sword.

Sheathing the weapon, Cullan followed the other out of the room. Goban had chosen a way down narrow, little-used stairs and passages. As they hastened downward, they could hear from elsewhere in the citadel the echo of excited voices, of hasty preparations.

Without challenge they reached the quay of the little inner harbor beneath the citadel, in which yellow light glistened off the dozen swift metal boats moored here.

"Dagda's craft is the fastest by far, but it is chained and locked," whispered Goban. "We must take the one in which we came."

The Tuathan again took the helm, starting the atomic mechanism purring and steering the slim boat quickly out the water-tunnel.

They emerged from the citadel into the silver mists. At once, Goban swung their craft in a wide circle to avoid the entrance to the main harbor of Thandara.

Looking back toward that harbor, Brian Cullan saw in it many boats gathered along the massive docks. Under the flare of brilliant lights, Tuathan warriors were loading heavy, spouted mechanisms into the boats.

"They prepare the instruments of our science that will loose destruction," said Goban. "The battle that comes will be terrible."

NOW they were clear of the island and the Tuathan swung their craft northward. At its highest speed it skimmed over the smooth swells of the sea, Cullan peering tautly from its bows.

Silver mists as of dreamlike moonlight shrouded all the world. Wisps and curls of the whitely radiant haze caught at their faces as their craft rushed on. Like dim ghost-lands vaguely bulked the islands through which they were passing.

Cullan felt an ever-fiercer impatience, born of his dread for Fand. That dread, and the rage against the Fomorians it engendered, brought stronger into his mind that wild, ruthless battle-passion that he believed was inheritance from long-dead Cuchulain. He told himself desperately that he must keep his head clear, must be Brian Cullan, not Cuchulain.

Goban was feeling something of that same fierce excitement. For the Tuathan called to him above the rush of the wind, his voice high.

"I am glad, now! I was the only warrior in Ethne who did not die fighting for the princess, and now I redeem that shame."

Silver moon-mists and vague islands rushed past, as they sped on and on toward the north. Soon there were no more islands to be glimpsed, only the spectral sea over whose low wave-crests the slim boat ran headlong.

Hours passed. Cullan saw the Tuathan constantly consult instruments in the stern and guessed that Goban was correcting and checking their course toward Mruun. They had already come a great distance, he knew.

The mists began to grow thicker, darker, colder. A chill that he had not before experienced on this world entered Brian Cullan's flesh from the wind. And ever darker, heavier, became the shrouding haze.

"We draw near toward Mruun!" Goban called finally. "Soon we may glimpse the cursed island."

Cullan's hopes flared up exultant. But the Tuathan added warning, "By now,

they'll have missed us at the citadel. And Lugh can follow swiftly."

A bare few minutes later, there came such a sharp and startled cry from Goban, that Cullan whirled quickly around.

Tall and somber in his silver mail and helmet, staring at them in stern accusation, Lugh stood in the speeding boat with them.

Cullan suddenly understood. "Lugh's image! The shape-sending—"

"Aye, it is how I have followed you," Lugh said harshly. He threateningly raised his arm, on which glittered the bracelet-shaped weapon that could loose lightning destruction. "Turn back at once toward Thandara!"

"I'll not turn back!" flamed Brian Cullan. "You can kill me, but while I live, I'm going on to Fand!"

Lugh slowly lowered his arm. "I shall not kill you, for you are valuable in our struggle against Tethra in a way you do not know."

He added sternly, "But you shall not reach Mruun. I thought you would defy me so, and so when first we missed you I sent Dagda after you."

The image of Lugh vanished abruptly with that ominous warning, withdrawn by that shape-sending science he had used to overtake them.

Goban's voice was appalled. "Dagda and his warriors pursuing us? And their craft is far faster than this one!"

"They'll not dare pursue us into Mruun itself," Cullan encouraged. "If we can reach the Fomorian city in time—"

THEIR Tuathan boat could not go faster, since already it was racing over the sea at its highest speed. Anxiously each few minutes now they peered back into the darkening mists, but saw no pursuers.

Another hour passed thus, and another. Then far and high in the cold, dark mists ahead, Cullan descried gleams of dull ocher light. Beneath those lights bulked vaguely the black battlements of lofty cliffs.

"Black Mruun at last!" he exulted. "We'll steal in below the cliffs and then—"

"Dagda comes!" yelled Goban, pointing backward.

Out of the mists behind them was emerging the spectral shape of a rushing Tuathan boat larger than their own. It held half a dozen warriors, with giant Dagda himself crouched at its prow.

"Turn and try to lose them in the mists!" cried Brian Cullan, desperate at the last-minute menace to his hopes.

Goban obeyed, swerving their racing craft so sharply that its gunwale dipped up sea. But turn and twist as they might, the other craft and Dagda's angry, booming voice hung close behind them.

"No use, Cuchulain!" cried Goban hopelessly. "They'll board us in a moment. And we cannot fight our own—"

He suddenly stopped, his face for a moment wild and startled as he peered through the mist beyond Cullan.

"The Fomorians!"

A dozen sharklike metal craft were rushing out of the mists upon them, from the direction of Mruun. Cullan glimpsed them, loaded with dark Fomorian warriors in black helmets and mail, yelling now in savage joy.

There was no chance for either Cullan's nor Dagda's craft to escape the ring that suddenly closed upon them. Flame-swords flared and clashed, men screamed and died in the mist, as the boats came together.

Cullan had his own sword out, triggering the deadly force into its blade as he struck across the gunwales at the wolfish, brutal figures looming through the mist. He saw Fomorian faces twist in agony as his blade touched bodies and loosed the destroying force on them.

"Slay not the outworlder Cuchulain!" yelled a captain in the Fomorian boat attacking them. "Remember Tethra's orders!"

Take him alive to torture with Fand? Cullan struck fiercely at the dark warriors who now were piling into his boat.

He glimpsed Dagda's craft rammed and sinking, the bellowing Tuathan giant pitched into the sea. Then, from his unguarded side, a Fomorian sword-hilt crashed against the base of his neck. And Brian Cullan felt himself sliding into blackness.

He awoke, his head aching violently, to a silence that seemed amazing transition from the roar and shock of battle.

Cullan opened his eyes. He was in a

dark stone chamber, windowless but chill with icy mists, lighted by a pulsing ocher radiance.

"Goban, what happened?" he stammered to the man supporting him. Then he saw that it was not Goban but huge Dagda, his shock head bare.

"Goban died a warrior's death in the fight," boomed the giant. "So did my men —but the cursed Fomorians picked *me* out of the water like a helpless fish as I sank in my mail."

Brian Cullan felt a pang, at the news of the brave Tuatha captain's death. Then he looked wonderingly around the dank room.

"We're in the castle of Tethra?" he husked.

"Aye, that we are," said Dagda grimly. His massive face was black with rage. "Captured like children by Tethra's dark devils! Outworlder, your crazy expedition hither has led us into a trap where I'll die without ever fighting in the last grand battle."

He strode the room furiously. "Se how this ocher radiance shrouds all the castle? It is no more light, but a shield of force that Tethra's science has flung forth to ward the lightning-loosing weapons of my people. Yes, the struggle will be bitter. And I to take no part in it!"

He was still growling curses when the door was unlocked. Black-mailed Fomorian guards with flame-swords entered the room.

"You go before Tethra now," snapped their officer. And as Dagda started ominously toward him, he added, "Resist, and you die here."

Brian Cullan made no resistance. He walked amid the alert guards with the swearing giant, with desperate hope that at least each stride might take him nearer Fand.

Dank and cold, flooded with the weird ocher radiance, were the black stone corridors of the castle Mruun. They came finally into a vast, vaulted room that Cullan well remembered—Tethra's throne-room.

Tethra himself stood by his throne, amid guards and captains, but Cullan gave him no second glance. For running toward him flashed the slim white figure of Fand.

"Cuchulain, you've thrown your life away by following me here!" she cried, in his arms.

Tears blurred her brilliant green eyes and wet her white face. As he crushed her close he felt the shiver of dread in her pliant body, and knew that it was dread for him.

But Cullan felt an incredible, soaring joy. He had won back to her through the dangers of two worlds, and somehow he would hold her.

"Fand! Fand!"

"They have us both, now," she whispered. "And they have the Gateway mechanism, down in the lowest level of this castle. And now—"

Cullan turned his head, and felt the raw red anger creep back into his mind as he met Tethra's gaze.

The Fomorian king stood, tall and dark in his black mail, eyeing Cullan's face with strange intentness. Again, it seemed to Cullan there was something vaguely familiar in Tethra's dark, strong, aging face.

"Cuchulain, in very truth!" whispered Tethra, incredulously. "But how *can* it be? Long ages have passed in the outworld since Cuchulain was born there."

Cullan answered harshly, fearlessly. "I am not the Hound. But he was my ancestor, long ago."

A strange, throbbing emotion showed in Tethra's eyes. His dark, sardonic face was not mocking now. It was yearning, glad.

"Now I understand!" he exclaimed. "Yes, you are Cuchulain reborn. In your veins flows his blood—and mine."

"Your blood?" Cullan cried, astounded. "Do you mean—"

"I was Cuchulain's father, long ago on Earth," said the Fomorian king. "Your forefather, *my son!*"

V

CULLAN was stunned, numbed. He saw shock and horror in Fand's white face as she looked up at him. He strove to open his mouth to deny.

But Tethra was speaking quickly, almost eagerly, his burning eyes clinging to Cullan's face as he spoke.

"It was half my lifetime ago, centuries ago in your time, that I led my Fomorians to invasion and conquest in your Earth. There I loved an Earth maiden and to us

was born a son, that Setanta who later won for himself the name Cuchulain.

"When Lugh and his Tuathans drove us back into this world, my son was left on Earth. But I yearned for him, and left command for him to seek me in this world when he reached manhood. And Cuchulain came, but he never found me. For he tarried with Fand until Lugh discovered his presence and forced him to return to Earth.

"For Lugh knew that he was my son! And Lugh knew when he saw *you* that you are the son of my blood reborn. That is why the Tuathan king showed you to me, by the shape-sending. Lugh meant to bargain with me, to exchange you to me for Fand."

Fand had shrunk out of Cullan's arms and the shade of horror and loathing on her face was stronger as she looked at him. And giant Dagda was glaring at him.

"It can't be true!" Cullan exclaimed. "I've no Fomorian blood, none of Tethra's blood, in me!"

"It *is* true!" Tethra affirmed. "Lugh returned later in image to offer me the exchange. He kept you ignorant of it all, of course."

Fatal conviction gripped Cullan, as he remembered Lugh's mysterious hints. And now, too, Brian Cullan realized why it was that Tethra's dark face was vaguely familiar. It was a mirror of his own face!

Tethra uttered a ringing laugh. "And now Lugh has been tricked for all his wily ways. I have Fand and the Gateway, and also I have you, the son I longed for."

He raised his voice. "Captains of Fomoria, hail my son Cuchulain, reborn and returned to me!"

From the black-mailed Fomorian lords came a roar of welcoming shouts. But Cullan was deaf to them as he turned wildly to the girl.

"Fand, this has not changed me! Even if I have Tethra's blood, my heart is with the Tuatha and with you!"

Clouded by the horror of a deep and ancient racial hate, Fand's white face looked up at him. Then that cloud vanished, and her green eyes flamed love and loyalty, as she stepped back toward him.

"I believe you, Cuchulain!" she whispered.

Angry murmurs rose from the Fomorian captains. And Tethra strode forward, astounded.

"You know not what you say, Chuchulain! You are my son, heir now to my power. Not only power over Fomoria's misty isles but power also soon over that Earth from which you came."

HIS dark eyes glowed and burned. "Once we pour through the Gateway, our science will crush all there who resist us. The battle will be great, but with a world as stakes. Surely such battle, such empire, must allure you if you have blood of mine."

Cullan, despite himself, *did* feel that tempting strike a strange, responsive chord within him. A chord of that savage ancestral personality that more than once had dominated him, he knew it to be.

Wild, dark blood of long-dead Cuchulain, blood of this ruthless king before him, running strong in his own veins—that was what he had to fight against.

"No, Tethra!" he said harshly. "My loyalty is to Earth and to the Tuatha who protects it from you."

Tethra's dark eyes blazed anger. "Has this white witch-girl made you a milksop? Will you turn against me when—"

Terrible interruption prevented him from finishing. A thunderous shock and roar shook the castle Mruun to its foundations. Outside the windows flared blinding light that dimmed the ocher radiance within to dullness.

Again and again came the flashes and rocking shocks. Cries were raised, and Tethra spun around with sword flaming in his hand as a Fomorian warrior rushed into the throne-chamber.

"The Tuatha fleet has come! Lugh's weapons loose their forces against the castle!"

Tethra's strong, undaunted voice rose to dominate the uproar. "To the defense, all! Lugh's warriors cannot enter here unless his weapons shatter our shield of force, and that they cannot do."

Answering with fierce yells, the Fomorian captains raced out of the throne-room. Tethra delayed to shout an order to the guards of the room.

"Bind them to the pillars, all three of them!" he ordered, pointing to Cullan and

Fand and Dagda. "But see that none harms them."

As the order was hastily obeyed, as the three were bound to three of the pillars along the wall of the vaulted chamber, the alert flame-swords of the guards prevented possibility of resistance.

Tethra lingered a moment, his powerful face dark with unguessable emotions as he looked into Cullan's eyes.

"You should be standing by my side in this battle, Cuchulain," he said. "But when we have beaten the Tuatha back, we will talk again of that."

He hastened out, a martial, mail-clad figure, followed by all but a few of the guards. Again, and again, the terrific lightning-flares of released forces blazed outside the castle and rocked it wildly.

But Cullan saw that the shielding ocher radiance now was burning stronger all through and around the castle. And other outleaping flares of force outside the windows told that the Fomorians were striking back at the Tuathan attackers.

Dagda, wild with fury, strained at his bonds. "To be tied here like a calf while the fate of all is decided!" bellowed the giant.

Fand, princess of a warrior race, cried to Cullan unafraid. "Cuchulain, if Lugh's great powers can force a way, all may yet be saved!"

Hell of other-world combat was raging now on the cliffs of Mruun, Cullan knew. Thunder and flare of titanic weapons seemed to set all the island shuddering as it reached terrible intensity.

And strongly, strongly, within him stirred that dark, wild battle-passion that was inheritance from the Hound. Why was he not out there in that mad fight?

"The shield of Mruun is failing!" Fand cried, her silver voice exultant. "See, the radiance dies!"

IT WAS true. The other glow of subtle force that had protected the castle was dimming, going out.

Crash on crash of thunderous, blazing force now smote unopposed into the massive pile. Walls began to crack and crumble, great blocks of stone to hurtle down into the quaking throne-room.

Cullan heard wild, exultant shouting somewhere out on the fringes of that stunning conflict. And Dagda's pale eyes flared.

"The Tuatha sweep into Mruun! Lugh's powers have breached a way for them!"

Into the throne-room now eerily lit by the continuous flares outside, came pouring a battered, disorganized remnant of the Fomorians.

Tethra, dusty, bloody and disheveled but with lion-courage blazing in his face, strode toward Cullan.

"The battle here is lost to Lugh's secret science-weapons, my son! But our plan is not yet lost if we can escape. And the only escape now for us and our warriors is throught the Gateway to Earth. The mechanism of the Gateway is below, and with it are the boats and weapons we prepared. This girl can operate it to take us through.

"Tell her to do it, Cuchulain! She loves you and will obey. Once in Earth, we can soon find way to bring through all the rest of our Fomorians, and so we will have snatched victory from Lugh."

Cullan, bound to the pillar, shook his head. "No! Do not do what they ask, Fand! They must not go through into Earth."

A Fomorian captain sprang raging forward with shining sword uplifted to strike at Cullan.

"This Cuchulain the king calls son is traitor to us!" he roared. "He dies with the other two now."

Tethra whirled and stabbed, his sword like a living brand of light. Its point ripped into the throat of the charging Fomorian and the man staggered and fell with his whole head blasted and blackened.

"No man kills the son of my blood, even though he fights against us!" flamed Tethra to the furious Fomorians.

"Then you can die with him!" howled voices, and his followers rushed with uplifted swords toward him.

Tethra's sword flashed with incredible speed, to cut through the bonds that held Cullan to the pillar. And then that terrible blade sang to blast down the two foremost of his attackers.

Brian Cullan, freed, swiftly stooped and snatched up the sword of the dead Fomorian at his feet. Triggering its force into its blade he sprang to Tethra's side to hold back the attackers from Dagda and Fand.

Tethra, striking and stabbing at the black-mailed onrush, shouted with fierce voice. "We two are match enough for these snarling wolves of mine, Cuchulain!"

CUCHULAIN? Yes, Cullan felt he was *all* Cuchulain in this red moment as he fought beside the tall Fomorian king. For the last and most terrible time, as he fought to protect Fand, there dominated him the wild, dark spirit of the ancient Hound.

Brutal faces went down blasted before the shining, stabbing blades of Tethra and himself. Fomorians maddened by rage tripped over their fellows' bodies and could not rise again before death smote them. Mad battle-passion of a dark and ancient blood roared out in the fierce war-shout that Cullan could not recognize as his own voice.

Tethra staggered suddenly, his whole side blasted where a sword had finally touched him. But as he toppled, the exultant wolf-cry of the maddened Fomorians changed to shouts of fear.

"The Tuatha!"

They were bursting into the throne-room, silver-mailed Tuatha warriors whose flame-swords cut into the dark Fomorians.

In moments, there were no black-mailed warriors left standing in that bloody, shattered room. And a great silence seemed suddenly to descend upon captured Mruun.

Brian Cullan had stumbled to the pillars, to free Fand and Dagda. The girl clung sobbing to him. He turned, as Lugh entered the throne-room with more of his silver host.

But it was toward prostrate Tethra that Cullan turned. He bent over the Fomorian king, whose strong face looked up at him dark and proud even as it stiffened with the approach of death.

Tethra whispered, "You fought beside me as I dreamed once of my son fighting. Blood answers the call of its own, Cuchulain."

He was dead, with the whisper. Queerly, Cullan felt a stinging in his eyes. And he rose to see giant Dagda make a gesture of salute toward the dead, black-mailed figure.

"Whatever else Tethra was, he was a warrior!" boomed the big Tuatha.

Lugh, his face still somber, was speaking to Cullan. "You proved this day that you were no enemy to our race despite your blood, outworlder. You can stay now in this world, if you wish."

If he wished? To stay here in this world of wonder and of beauty with Fand? Cullan took her in his arms for answer.

Golden mists, golden day, glowed warmly over the smiling yellow ocean as the fleet of Tuatha boats neared the end of its long journey homeward.

Lugh's craft drove beside that in which Brian Cullan sat with Fand.

The Tuatha lord called to them across the water.

"We go to Thandara. But you will to Ethne, for there is Fand's home as guardian of the Gateway. It has been cleared of its dead and others of my folk will re-people it."

Thus the fleet split, the smaller portion bearing Fand and Cullan and the recovered Gateway eastward through the remembered islands.

Through the golden mists, Ethne rose in all its bubble beauty beneath that eternal rainbow of water across the sky. Cullan, with Fand in his arms, looked raptly. He had found his lost elysium, had awakened from the drab dream of Earth. He was coming home at last.

Mrs. Lannisfree

By AUGUST DERLETH

Always listening, waiting for something—Lord, it gets on your nerves!

IF IT comes right down to it, there is not much that I know about either Mr. or Mrs. Lannisfree, even though I worked for him for almost a month. He was a stranger to me; that is, I left the city to go with him. The agency called me and asked whether I would mind working in the country.

Not farm work. Simply as a companion to a man who had been told to get some rest and did not want to spend alone the month or so before his wife came to join him. I needed money just then, too, and I took it. He was down at the agency, and wanted me to come down.

"I wanted an older man," he said when I

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

walked in and was introduced to him. "Are you likely to get lonely?"

I said I didn't think so. It depended on where we were going.

"Into the lake country up along the coast."

"If I can get into the woods once in a while, I won't be lonesome," I said.

He thawed out a little, though he still seemed morose—a medium-sized man, with a firm jaw and hard eyes. You could see that he was used to having his way about things, and I felt that he resented having to go away, and yet, somehow, had to go. He explained that he was not very talkative, not at all good company, and yet needed someone around to take care of little things. It had to be a man, to preserve propriety, since his wife would join him as soon as she could get away. He had a cottage on a lake up north, and we would be rather isolated. But the month was June; there would be fishing, if I cared for it, and I would have enough time to myself to make up for his moods and his solitudes.

It was really more than a cottage. Perhaps it had started out like one, but the fact was that Mr. Lannisfree had added to it from time to time; so that now it resembled a rambling cabin. It was attractive, too, set in a little grove of oak and cedar not far from the lake—probably about two hundred feet. I had a room all to myself, but I saw that taking care of the place would mean more work than I had figured on, because there were a large living room, a glassed-in porch on the south side, where he intended to work—if he worked at all—three bedrooms, and a kitchen besides the store-room and the open veranda. The cabin was far enough from the road so that dust was not as much of a problem as I had thought it might be. So I had to keep it clean—he did the cooking—look after the grounds, and just keep myself fairly close by in case Mr. Lannisfree got into the mood for talk or anything else—like chess, which he played and soon taught me to play.

He never told why he had been ordered to rest, but he certainly did not have to tell it; you could see that he was a nervous type, despite his big frame. He did not look like a lawyer, which he was; he looked more like a football player, and it turned out that he used to play football in high school. But he was fifty or more now, though he looked younger. I got used to his nervous habits after a while, but at first he startled me. The first time I noticed anything was during the second game of chess we played—after I had learned enough about the game to play it without always being told what I could do and what I couldn't. I was thinking about a move, and finally made it; but he didn't move; so I looked at him, and there he sat, with his head bent to one side a little.

"Your move, Mr. Lannisfree," I said.

"Did you hear anything, Jack?" he asked.

"Why, no," I said. "Nothing, that is, except a loon out there on the lake."

"Oh, was that what it was?"

"Yes," I said.

Just then the loon called again and he never batted an eyelash; so I knew it was not the loon he thought he had heard.

"What was it like?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said curtly, and that was that.

THE next thing I found out about him was that he liked to prowl around at night. It was not that I ever saw him, but I found evidence of it often enough. The worst of that was, as I soon discovered, he didn't remember that he did it, and more or less suspected me of doing it.

It was about a week after we came that he called me on it. He got up late that morning, and I overslept, too. He got out first, and next thing I knew I heard him calling me. He sounded angry and anxious.

I got out of bed and went into the living-room. All the bedrooms opened off the living-room; they were small, but comfortable, with good beds—not just cots in them. He was standing just outside his door, and his face was a color that might have meant he was angry or sick or both.

"Did you do this, Jack?" he asked.

I saw what he meant. Someone had walked across the floor with wet feet, leaving a trail of blurred wet footprints; and the knob of his door was wet, too. I knew I hadn't been out in the night; so that left him walking in his sleep or going out to take a swim in the lake and not remembering it.

"I might have been walking in my sleep," I said.

"Do you swim in your sleep, too?" he asked.

"If you're asleep, you might not know it," I said.

"Clean it up," he said.

Then and there I discovered something very strange. The lake was a freshwater lake, of course, about ten miles from the Maine coast, but when I came with a rag to wipe up the wet spots and bent over them I noticed right away that it was sea-water. I was born in Gloucester, and the smell of the ocean is just like second-nature to me. I didn't say anything to Mr. Lannisfree, because I thought it might bother him. As it was, it bothered me. I couldn't figure it out, and for the first time I began to look forward to the time when his wife came and I could go back.

He talked a good deal about his wife. It was "Mrs. Lannisfree this" and "Mrs. Lannisfree that" for long spells at a time. I got the picture of her pretty soon—an Irish-French girl, somewhat younger than he: about ten years or so—with dark blue eyes and black hair, worn long, down to her waist, he said. According to his lights, she was a very beautiful woman. Right now she was at work writing a book, and she could not take herself too far away from her references, or she would be at a loss for the finishing of the book. The Lannisfrees moved in a circle of writers and artists and well-known people of all kinds. I thought it was queer that, with all the way he had her on his mind, he didn't have a picture of her up, and I asked about it. But he smiled and said that no picture "could do her justice," but he had a watch-back snapshot of her and showed it to me. I agree that she was beautiful, and also that the snapshot probably didn't do right by her.

"I'll be looking forward to seeing her," I said.

"I don't blame you; most men do. She's always been very popular."

THE days went by slowly. It was one round of cleaning up and chess and fishing. Sometimes he played game after game; whole afternoons or evening were taken up with chess. Sometimes it seemed that he didn't want to talk; he was moody, and would sit for a long time over legal papers on the glassed-in porch or the open veranda and just look out into the woods or over the lake. And then there were times when he sat or stood with his head cocked, just as if he were listening.

Sometimes I watched him, keeping myself hidden. It was strange. He would look around very furtively, as if he expected someone to show himself. Sometimes I walked right up to him, and every time he would give himself away somehow. It was, "Anybody been straying around this afternoon, Jack?" or "Do you hear someone walking?" I never did. I understood that this was his nervousness and this was why he needed a rest.

It went on this way for a few days.

Something else went on that I could not figure out. That was the wet doorknobs and the wet footprints on the floor. Most of the time I managed to get up before he did—early enough to clean them up before he saw them. But once in a while he saw the marks where the carpet or the floor hadn't quite dried. He never said anything again; he just looked away as if nothing were there. I couldn't get that out of my mind. I wanted to ask him about it, time after time, but something there was in his eyes, I couldn't do it. I wanted to know how it was if he went out and took a swim in the night in the lake he came in dripping sea-water. For it was sea-water every time; I could feel the salt on my hands. I could taste it, and I did. There was never the doubt of it in my mind. But how he did it, I didn't know, though sometimes I sat for a long time trying to figure it out. There was a broad brook running down from the lake to the ocean; it grew into a small river before it emptied into the Atlantic, but of course the brook was fresh water, too.

I thought the best thing to do would be to catch him at it. So I laid my plans and I never slept one night—just sat up and listened. I never heard him go out, but I heard him come in. I heard him coming along the hall, quiet as could be; and I planned to step out and surprise him, but just then I heard a strange voice.

"Roger," it said. "Roger!"

A woman's voice, calling to Mr. Lannisfree, and, judging by the sound of it, she was standing just outside his door. She was

calling in a husky, urgent voice, as if she wanted him badly, and yet with a kind of command in it.

"Roger!" she called in that harsh whisper. *"Roger!"*

There was something about it to make a man grow cold. Sometimes it begged him, and sometimes it ordered, and sometimes it wept. It was a terrible thing. I thought that all the time Mr. Lannisfree was up here waiting for his wife he was carrying on with some other woman. That was what I thought. So I didn't go out of my room that night; I just listened and waited for him to answer; but he never did—he just lay there in his room and tossed and fretted and once or twice he moaned, as if he were having a bad dream.

In the morning those footprints were there again, and the wetness on his doorknob. I looked at all the tracks carefully, and one of them was not so blurred; it looked more like a woman's footprint. I got them all wiped up before he came out, and they were dried, too, before he showed up.

He looked bad that morning—just as if he hadn't slept much.

"Did you hear anything last night, Jack?" he asked.

Naturally, I didn't want him to think I had heard anything, if there were something between him and some woman in the neighborhood. So I said no.

"You didn't call me?"

"Not unless it was in my sleep," I said. "They tell me sometimes I talk in my sleep—but I don't remember it."

"No, you don't usually."

I COULDN'T imagine what he would be able to see in another woman with a wife as beautiful as Mrs. Lannisfree, and I tried to imagine what he would do about that woman when she got there. I could figure out the footprints now, all right—even if I couldn't figure out the smell of the sea. The woman probably lived somewhere along the lake and swam over to our shore, and came on in. That would account for everything—everything, that is, but the smell. I got to thinking of that so strongly that I couldn't help blurting it out.

"Is there any body of salt water around here any place, Mr. Lannisfree?" I asked.

"Not back from the coast."

"Sure?"

"I know this country. I could walk it blindfolded. Why?"

"Because—" I felt foolish now. "Because that wetness on your doorknob and the marks on the floor are salt-water."

He got red, and then white. His jaw set tautly. That's damned nonsense," he said harshly.

I went into the kitchen and got the rag I had used to wipe it up. I brought it out and held it under his nose. "Smell that," I said.

He did. He glared at me in a kind of disgust and shook his head.

"It smells of sea-water," I said.

"It's your imagination, Jack. Put that thing away and let's hear no more about it."

I did what I was told. But that didn't alter anything. That rag was soaked with sea-water. When it dried out it showed a frost of salty white. I know sea-water to the taste and the feel and the smell. I was born in Gloucester, and a boyhood in Gloucester puts the tang of the salt sea air in a man's blood. You don't make a mistake like that. I don't say it can't be done; I just say I didn't make it. That was sea-water, or I've never tasted or felt or smelled sea-water.

But all that day Mr. Lannisfree was silent and moody. He did no work, and the only time he spoke to me after that was when I came up to him and found him sitting in front of his opened watch, gazing at that picture of his wife.

"I don't want you to say anything of this to Mrs. Lannisfree when she comes," he said.

"Very well," I said. "I won't."

Well, that night ended it.

It was a clear, moonlit night, with some clouds wind-driven across the heavens, and a wonderful pine smell in the air, not the kind of a night you want to go to bed early, and we didn't go, either; we played two games of chess, but Mr. Lannisfree's heart wasn't in it, and around about eleven o'clock we finally went to bed.

I was tired, but I did not want to sleep. I had the feeling you sometimes get when you know something is going to happen. I

was sure that woman would be coming back, and tonight I was going to open the door and talk to her. So I lay there wide awake. I heard the old ormolu clock on the fireplace mantel in the living-room strike twelve, and then one, and then two.

And then I heard the door open, the same as the night before, and I think, now that I've thought it all over, it was the same time. I heard those footsteps sort of whispering along the floor across the living-room from the outer door, and come to a pause before his door. And then I heard her voice again, the same as the night before.

"Roger!" she called. "Roger!"

I walked over to my own door and opened it. I looked out.

SHE was standing about ten feet away, her back toward me. She was at Mr. Lannisfree's door all right. But I was surprised—more than I had expected to be. I thought she would be in a bathing suit, but she wasn't. She was in traveling clothes—a kind of business suit, such as women wear, and I could see from my doorway that she had had an accident, for it was sopping wet.

I stepped out into the hall and I said, "Why don't you go in?"

She turned around slowly, and I felt cold all over. She didn't say anything, but just stood there looking at me. Then she took a step forward, and her face came into a patch of moonlight and I saw that it was Mrs. Lannisfree herself.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Lannisfree," I said.

"Where is Roger?"

"You know he's in there," I said.

"His door is locked."

"My key will fit it."

"Thank you."

I got my key and gave it to her. Her hand was so cold, and I could almost hear her teeth chattering. When I gave her the key I saw her eyes. They were not like the eyes in that snapshot Mr. Lannisfree had in the back of his watch; they did not seem to see me at all; they looked straight through me and seemed to be fixed on something and she never once seemed to swivel them around or anything, but just held her gaze straight in front of her, and she took that key and turned to the door, working at it with the key. And I was almost drowned in the smell of the sea, it was that strong; it even seemed to come in under my door after I was back in my own room once more.

And then I heard Mr. Lannisfree scream. Just once. It was terrible; I did not know he could be so surprised at his wife's sudden coming. He called out her name. "Myra!" Just like that.

"I've come, Roger," she said.

THEN there was a series of sounds, and I thought she was getting out of those wet clothes, but after a little while, I heard her walking out of that room, and out of the house. I opened my window and looked out; the moon was still shining brightly, but I couldn't see anything. I stepped out on the veranda, and then I saw her walking down through the woods toward the brook, away from the lake. She hadn't taken off her wet clothes at all, but just walked there straight away from the cabin, and I could see her in the moonlight just as plain as I can see you now, with the moonlight white on her face and hands, the way it should be.

I didn't sleep much the rest of that night, waiting for her to come back, and next morning the wet footprints were there again, and Mr. Lannisfree's doorknob was wet, and I cleaned it all up and waited for him to come. But he didn't come, and he didn't come, and then I went into his room at last, after he didn't answer to my knocks, I found him just the way he was when the sheriff got there—dead in his bed, with that long black hair wound around his neck to choke him to death!

That was just six hours after I saw Mrs. Lannisfree.

And that is why I don't believe it when they say that Mr. Lannisfree took his wife out off the coast of Maine that day almost a month ago and pushed her into the water and drowned her because he was jealous of that other man they say Mrs. Lannisfree liked, even if her body was recovered, because I saw her just as plain as I see you now, with the moonlight white on her face and hands, walking through the woods toward the sea.

The Cranberry Goblet

Doom comes in many guises, each one sure and deadly . . . .

By HAROLD LAWLOR

IT LOOKS as innocent as Coralie herself—that cranberry goblet. It has been in Michael's family for many years—the last of a set once owned, perhaps, by his grandparents. But no one really knows. Michael himself doesn't know. It has just been around for as long as he can remember. Square at the top, slightly convex at the sides, its bowl is the color of ripe cranberries—a live glowing scarlet, deepening sometimes to ruby; its stem and base are of rock crystal, clear and beautifully cut.

The first time I ever saw Michael's sister, Coralie, she held it in her hand. It was early morning and she was in bed, propped up among a number of tiny, lacy pillows. The sun was streaming brilliantly through the white venetian blinds, and Coralie was holding the goblet between herself and the light, regarding the effect in the mirror opposite her bed.

"Look, Michael!" she cried as we came in. The goblet threw a roseate glow over her pallor. "Look how disgustingly pink and healthy I've grown while you've been away!"

Coralie's laughter was as crystal clear as the stem of the cranberry goblet. Michael grinned, and I was smiling as he drew me nearer the bed. "This is Ann, Coralie," he said.

Her swift turquoise glance took in all that there was of me to see in one brief instant —brown hair, brown eyes, the plain blue suit I'd been married in. Then she held wide her arms like a child, and cried, "Ann, dear!"

I was quite prepared to love her. In the hectic week I'd known Michael at the lake, there'd been room only for this wonderful thing that had happened so suddenly. Our falling in love. It wasn't until we'd made our hasty decision to marry, and were driving in Michael's car to the nearest justice of the peace, that he'd turned to me and said, "I have a sister, Ann. An invalid since she was a child. She'll have to live with us."

The wind had feathered his brown hair down over his tanned forehead. His dark blue eyes were worried. I never loved him so much as at that moment. "Where else would she live?" I smiled.

He gave a sigh of relief at that, but the little furrow still remained between his brows. "You see, she's badly spoiled, I'm afraid."

So that was it. He thought she'd be jealous of men. But, "I'll spoil her, too!" I promised recklessly.

And now here she was, not at all alarming, kissing my cheek with cool lips, seeming not to resent me at all. Looking like a fragile angel among her pillows, with her turquoise eyes and pale gold hair.

Michael was beaming suddenly, too, and looking oddly relieved. It was only then I realized he'd been wearing a worried frown ever since sending the telegram to Coralie announcing our sudden marriage. *Men!* I thought in fond despair. What had he expected us to do—claw each other's eyes out? It was absurd. As if I could help feeling fond at first sight of this sister of his—so child-like, so appealing.

THERE was some mix-up about our luggage. Before attending to it, Michael stayed until Coralie had filled the cranberry goblet with water from a silver carafe on the bedside table, dropped in a capsule which dissolved instantly, and swallowed

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

the colorless mixture. Something wrong with her heart, Michael had said. From where I was standing I could see the box from which she'd taken the capsule, could even read the underscored warning, printed in red: *One* capsule *only*, mornings.

I went with Michael to the door, and when he was gone I turned back to the bed. To Coralie. To shocked surprise.

Gone were the soft eyes, the dimples, the child-like air. She lay back among her pillows, and over her face was a blank expressionlessness, infinitely cold.

"We can talk now, without pretending," she said.

"Pretending?"

"You heard me." Stiff-armed, she thrust herself up to a sitting position. "You're not so naive as to think I intend to share Michael with you? He's *my* brother. In

the past, all his attention has been for me. It's going to continue that way. You don't count at all."

She *was* a child, after all, I thought. Smiling, I went over and sat on the edge of the bed. "Coralie, listen to me. There's room for both of us—"

But she wasn't listening. Her eyes held that blank look of an ego turned in upon itself, and her voice was hot with resentment. "No doubt you think you'll have an easy time of it, winning him away from me. But you won't. Maybe I'm helpless, but I'm clever, too. I'll never rest till I drive you out."

An infantile threat, surely. I don't know why I took it seriously. Yet her anger was contagious. I found myself losing my temper. "And do you think I'll stand by, doing nothing, if you try it?" I started for the door, determined to get out before I made an exhibition of myself.

"You won't do anything, you won't do anything," she taunted in a chant that followed me across the room. "No matter what you do, I'll win. Because—" Her voice fluttered uncertainly. "Because—"

Curious, I looked back. Her eyes were fixed, not on me, but upon the cranberry goblet. Slowly, as I watched, they turned to me. And surely that was fear lurking in their depths?

"Because," she said in a whisper now, "even if I lose I'll win."

A strange thing for her to say. It's only now that I know just how strange. But certainly, for a minute there, she must have seen the fate of the three of us in the cranberry goblet?

THERE were weeks, then, in which I learned just how clever Coralie could be. And it took me weeks to learn. I don't know how I could have been so stupid, so blind. By the time I saw the way things were going, it was too late for ordinary measures. The damage was done.

In the beginning, every morning after Michael had left for the office, I would knock at Coralie's door, eager to make amends, to try to get off on the right foot with her. But I was never permitted to enter. Mrs. Dunnigan, our housekeeper (and Coralie's willing slave), would open the door the merest slit. And her thin-lipped mouth would open the merest slit, too, in her hard, set face.

Miss Coralie was resting. Miss Coralie didn't feel well enough this morning for visitors. No, there was nothing you could do. Yes, Mrs. Whittington, I'll let you know if she asks for you.

Days of this. Until, after a time, I stopped trying to be friendly. Perhaps she'd get over it faster if I left her alone.

Then Michael, one morning at breakfast, said mildly, "Why don't you ever go in to see Coralie?"

I looked at him in blank amazement. Surely he must know how Coralie felt about me? "But, Michael dear, I've tried. She doesn't want to see me. I can never get in."

Mrs. Dunnigan, pouring coffee, sniffed audibly. And her narrow, black back somehow managed to convey eloquent disbelief for Michael's benefit. Before I could say anything, Mrs. Dunnigan was asking Michael's advice about something, so that her insinuation that I was lying was left dangling in the air until it became, somehow, truth.

What Michael believed I do not know. But he must have said something to Coralie. And always, after that, I visited her room with him in the morning before he went to work. True, between Coralie and me there was nothing more than an exchange of polite insincerities. But she didn't dare deny me entrance—not with Michael at my side. Nor could she any longer accuse me to him of neglect.

But Coralie wasn't finished. It went on. Michael's friends, who'd welcomed me so gladly at first, slowly began to withdraw, and to eye me with ssupicion and dislike when we did meet. It hurt me, at first, and bewildered me, but gradually I began to understand. Their coldness always seemed to coincide with their visits to Coralie.

What was she saying to them about me? That I was mean, cold, heartless? Perhaps that I'd married Michael only for his money, and wanted to drive Coralie out? However she was knifing me, she was gaining her effect. She was ill, lovely, pathetic; I was well, presumably at an advantage. It's only natural that the sympathies of Michael's friends should go to her.

Even by the time I grew morally certain of just how she was accomplishing her ends, it was too late to do anything. I couldn't go to Michael's friends and ask them, for they would only deny it strenuously, misguidedly thinking that in so doing they were only protecting Coralie from further abuse. I most certainly wouldn't go to Coralie and tax her with what she was doing. Accuse her, and know that all the while, behind her bland surprise and pitying denial, she'd be laughing at me delightedly. She *wanted* me to suspect what she was doing. She just didn't want me to get any proof.

My only defense was to withdraw more and more into the shell of pretended indifference. Then Coralie for days would be gay and kind and friendly, until I began to doubt my own suspicions. Eagerly I'd make friendly overtures in return, only to be rebuffed. It was all nicely calculated to drive a sensitive person to the verge of insanity. It was all done so subtly that even now I despair of making anyone see just how she gained her ends.

And Michael? What did he see? What was he thinking? It was impossible for me to guess. His face was blank most of the time, his manner that of a polite stranger. Gradually a rift appeared between us. Gradually it widened. I couldn't be sure what Coralie was saying to him. I grew more and more uncertain of myself, more and more withdrawn.

While I watched in a sort of sick despair, I saw him grow first wary, then cold, then indifferent to me. I still retained enough reason to blame Coralie for what was happening. But I had no proof. For she was never crude, or careless, or even explicit. There'd be a sly insinuation here, a subtle suggestion there. To Michael. About me. Anything to create doubt.

But Michael, I thought, would never understand this, never blame Coralie for what was happening. Men, they say, are by nature more open, more direct. If I went to him, telling him what I suspected, I felt he'd only regard Coralie as misunderstood, and myself as jealous, suspicious—at best, a whining martyr.

Coralie, I knew, was relying on this.

My hands were hopelessly tied. It was impossible to combat her tactics.

MY DECISION to kill Coralie was not a sudden thing. I think it had been growing on me for weeks. Perhaps in the beginning my mind had rejected the idea in horror, but in the end I grew to accept it. I don't think I was entirely sane by that time, living as I had been in an atmosphere of suspicion, intrigue, and distrust. But perhaps I was sane enough. Perhaps I'm only trying, now, to rationalize my guilt.

I remember the night my purpose crystallized. It was after a climactic quarrel with Michael. We'd been quarreling frequently, our nerves rubbed raw. But tonight we shouted like drunken tenement dwellers, and at the last I slapped him stingingly. Strange that I can't remember the source of our quarrel. It was like that, those days. We were fighting about nothing at all

But I can remember thinking how glad Coralie was going to be when she learned of it, as I knew she very shortly would. Mrs. Dunnigan always went to her immediately, I was sure, carrying stories.

Michael slammed out of the house finally, and I dragged myself to the bedroom, and threw myself across one of the twin beds, sobbing stormily. Until at last I grew quieter, and my emotions played themselves out, and I could think.

Was this the way it was going to end? The marriage I'd entered with such high hope? Once I'd loved Michael, and he'd loved me. Somewhere still, I felt the seed of that love yet existed. But unless I did something, soon, even that would be gone.

And I thought, I must kill Coralie. Now. Before it was too late.

IT LOOKS so dreadfully melodramatic as I set it down. *I must kill Coralie.* But I felt calm, even happy, at the time. I rationalized. Coralie had been an invalid for years. It would be a mercy-death, really, not murder. I was only sacrificing one for the happiness of two.

I knew just how I must go about it. The capsule Coralie took every morning. *One* capsule *only.* I could see those red letters plainly, here on the wall of my darkened bedroom. Every morning Michael and I were in Coralie's room as she took her capsule. It would be so easy for me to drop

two of them beforehand into the cranberry goblet. And they left no betraying trace.

DOCTOR HADDON—Peter Haddon, Michael's good friend—was not suspicious. He straightened up from where he'd been bending over Coralie's body, lying there so still among the laces and ruffles of the bed-covering. He stood there a moment, looking down at her, and his dark eyes seemed sad.

Coralie once again looked like the fragile angel I'd first seen upon coming to this house. Except for a thin line of dried saliva running from mouth to chin, she was lovely as a bit of Venetian glass.

I felt no pity. I had no regrets.

Dr. Haddon turned to Michael, who was looking so stricken. (Oh, I'd make it up to him! I would!)

"I'm sorry, Michael," Peter said gently. "I know there's nothing I can say, but—she hadn't much of a life, you know, chained to this bed as she was."

Michael mumbled something. Then, "Will you show Peter out, Ann? I'd like to be alone—with her—for a while."

Out in the hall, Peter drew me away from the door we'd closed behind us. "I'm not saying anything to Michael, Ann, but there's something—"

He *was* suspicious! My heart lurched sickeningly. My hand trembled as it went to my lips.

Peter's face softened. "I know this has been a shock for you, too. But I thought I'd better tell you. Coralie took an overdose of those capsules."

I breathed again. "Over-dose?"

He patted my shoulder. "Deliberately, I'm afraid. But no one need ever know. And I thought it was kinder not to tell Michael. We can avoid an inquest—I'll take care of everything. Poor Coralie—"

Luckily, Peter had been away for months. Coralie had never poisoned his mind against me.

But when he was gone, and all during that time until the funeral, I watched Michael walking around like a man in a daze, and wondered if I'd only made everything worse.

But once the funeral was over, I knew that I had not. It was as if a miasma were suddenly lifted from the apartment and both of us in it. Only Mrs. Dunnigan walked around numbly, watching me covertly.

I'll always remember those two days after the funeral. The happiest days I've ever known. Once more, Michael and I were as we had been that first week we'd met at the lake. All the bitterness and distrust had gone with Coralie.

And then, on the third morning, happened the first of those weird occurrences that were to follow so frighteningly.

I'D DECIDED, and Michael agreed, that we should dismantle Coralie's bedroom and turn it into a game room. The day before I'd gone in there to see what needed to be done, and the first thing that met my eyes was the cranberry goblet.

It seemed to hit me with the force of a blow, glowing there so redly in the sunlight. I didn't want to touch it. I didn't want to remember those two capsules sliding so stealthily from my hand into its bowl. I didn't want to be reminded of Coralie, and the goblet was a symbol of her.

Perhaps I was being fanciful, but to me the goblet *was* Coralie. Outwardly she appeared like its stem, pure and white and crystal-clear; but at the core, I'd always believe, she was scarlet as its bowl.

I didn't touch the thing. I called Mrs. Dunnigan and I pointed to it. "Wash that, please, then put it away. We shan't be using it ever again."

I thought the woman looked at me queerly, but she only said, "Yes, Mrs. Whittington," and bore it away.

But now, on this third morning after the funeral, as I went into the room with the man who'd come to measure for the new linoleum floor, I saw the cranberry goblet glowing at me again from its place on the bedside table.

I waited till the man had done his measuring and gone before I called Mrs. Dunnigan. "I wanted you to put the goblet away," I said mildly. "Not return it to where it was."

She frowned at it. "But I did, Mrs. Whittington. I put it in the pantry, and I'm sure I don't know—" She picked it up. "Why, it's full of water!"

She brought it to me so that I could see the clear liquid lapping gently against the square sides of the glass. That was the way it had looked the morning Coralie died. When I'd dropped those capsules—

I turned away, feeling a little sick. "Empty it and lock it in the court cabinet in the dining room."

Michael kept his liquors in the cabinet and always locked the door—though this was a gesture, merely, since the key remained in the lock.

The men came just then to remove the furniture from Coralie's room and I busied myself with other things, forgetting about the goblet.

BUT the next morning, when I awoke, I was angry. And, I thought, enlightened.

For the first thing I saw was the cranberry goblet on my bedside table. I didn't get up, but by stretching I could see that it was full of colorless liquid.

I thought I had the explanation right away. Mrs. Dunnigan was doing this. I didn't know what she suspected, or what she hoped to gain, but it seemed obvious she was leaving this reminder constantly about.

I rang for the housekeeper.

"I thought I told you to lock that in the cabinet," I said, when she was standing before me.

She seemed genuinely surprised when she saw the goblet. I hadn't thought she'd be so good an actress. "I did put it away, Mrs. Whittington. And locked the door."

"You're lying to me," I said flatly.

She opened her mouth, perhaps to deny the charge, then closed it, trap-like. Her eyes seemed to be appraising me shrewdly, and I didn't like the calculating look that flitted across her hard face. I'd had enough of the woman. There had always been veiled insolence in her manner to me.

"I'm giving you two weeks' notice," I said. "With the help shortage what it is, you should be able to find something else by then."

She drew herself up. "If you'll give me two weeks' salary, I'll leave today. I've not been satisfied here since Miss Coralie—"

I nodded.

Mrs. Dunnigan went out. "I *did* lock that goblet away."

"I don't believe you."

She continued. "But why does the goblet bother you so much, Mrs. Whittington? Do you think it's strange that it's always full of liquid? *I* do."

"Keep still!"

"Perhaps Miss Coralie is putting it there," she said nastily. "Perhaps she wants you to drink—"

"Get out!" I cried, infuriated.

The woman shrugged, and turned to leave. But at the door she faced me again, with a sly smile. "Are you *afraid*, Mrs. Whittington?"

I was, suddenly. I think for the first time I really realized what I'd done. And it must have showed in my face. For Mrs. Dunnigan burst into satisfied, hysterical laughter.

I WAS furious with myself for letting the woman bait me so successfully. It was not only stupid of me, it was dangerous. I couldn't afford to be rousing anyone's suspicions. In the future, I must be more careful.

I dressed, emptied the contents of the goblet down the lavatory drain, and this time locked it away myself in the court cabinet. Then, taking the key, went to drive Michael to the station. He had to go to St. Louis on business for two days.

"Mrs. Dunnigan is leaving," I said casually, as we drove along. I was a little nervous as I didn't know just how attached he might be to the housekeeper, or if he would resent my dismissing her.

Luckily, Michael was preoccupied and asked no questions. "Get somebody else," he suggested shortly, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Evidently her going meant nothing to him.

At the station, I gave him the key to the court cabinet, and asked him to put it on his key-chain with the others. This roused him. "What?" he laughed. "Are you a secret drinker? Are you locking temptation away?"

"Exactly!" I agreed demurely, lifting my face for his kiss.

So that was that. The cranberry goblet would stay where it was for awhile. There'd

be no more Mrs. Dunnigan in the apartment, playing tricks. Just as there was no more Coralie.

I shivered suddenly, and for the first time since her death felt a vague depression.

IT WASN'T until the next morning that I really began to know what fear could be like.

I remember lying there with my eyes still closed, feeling, even at the moment of awakening, a slight uneasiness. Sensing something wrong in the empty apartment, in the bedroom empty save for myself.

The uneasiness increased. And slowly the conviction grew upon me that I had only to turn my head, open my eyes, to find it there on my bedside table. The cranberry goblet.

It was ages before I could nerve myself to turn my head, inch by cautious inch, on the pillow. Eons, surely, before my reluctant eyelids opened, and—

Yes, it was there! Its contents lapping softly against the sides of the bowl, as if the glass had just been set down.

A sharp intake of breath, the startled leap of my heart. There was someone in the room! I felt the presence strongly, though I could see no one.

I drew myself up slowly until my back was resting against the headboard of the bed. My eyes ranged the room warily. Was that a shadow, deeper than the other shadows, over in the corner? Was that my voice calling, "Coralie?"

No answer.

"It *is* you, Coralie." My head nodded wisely, my voice echoed eerily in the quiet bedroom. "You're trying to play on my nerves, aren't you? Trying to frighten me into confession." I smiled cunningly. "Well, you won't succeed. You'll never succeed." Bravado crept into my voice. "I'm not so easily frightened."

I don't know how long I crouched there against the tufted satin headboard. But reason came back abruptly. I was like one roused sharply from a bad dream, who doubts the dream. Surely I had been dreaming?

But no. The goblet *was* there, its contents making a gurgling, contented sound in the stillness. It didn't frighten me now. Mrs. Dunnigan, of course! Somehow she had crept back.

I opened the venetian blinds so the sunlight might pour in, and dressed swiftly. My spirits lifted with the sun, and I could scarcely credit my superstitious terror of the moment before.

Coralie was dead.

It was in a spirit of defiance then that I emptied the goblet and hid it on the highest shelf of one of the cabinets in the kitchen. To make the hiding place doubly secure, I first buried the glass deep in a canister full of flour.

There. Let Mrs. Dunnigan sneak into the apartment again and try to find it. Let Mrs. Dunnigan try— My smile of satisfaction slowly faded. But I'd locked the door of the court cabinet! And the key—the key was with Michael, in St. Louis!

A cold draught from nowhere played against my back. The apartment was quiet, dreadfully quiet.

I was afraid.

LATE that afternoon I had a curious conversation with Dr. Peter Haddon, who'd dropped in thinking to find Michael at home. A conversation that should have been enlightening, but wasn't—plunging me instead into deepest bewilderment.

It must have been Peter who first spoke of Coralie's death. Heaven knows I wouldn't have introduced the subject myself. But as we spoke of her I found myself wondering—had Coralie known, just before the end, that her medicine had been tampered with?

I found myself hoping vindictively that this was so—that she'd suffered bitterly, helplessly in the knowledge, as she had made me suffer.

Had there been a moment, just before death came so swiftly, when she had known from the taste of the drink that I must have given her an over-dose? Or had the stronger solution tasted no different than her usual dose?

So strong was my sudden desire to know that I heard myself saying, "I don't see how she could have forced herself to drink that overdose. Surely those three capsules must have made the drink so unpalatable—"

But I found but something else. Something totally unexpected.

"Three capsules?" Peter questioned. "Three capsules wouldn't have killed her."

That startled me. "But she died! Three must have—"

"How do you know there were three?"

Careful! I'd nearly betrayed myself. I looked up to find Peter watching me strangely.

"Why," I faltered. "The box said one capsule only. It seems reasonable to suppose that a person bent on suicide would put two in the glass, doubling the dose, then add a third to make certain."

But Peter shook his head. "Three would have made her very ill, but they wouldn't have killed her. She must have taken more."

I couldn't understand it. Peter was very emphatic that three wouldn't have killed her. When he had left, I kept thinking, "But there were only three! The one capsule Coralie had put in the glass herself, and the two that I—"

I shut off my thoughts. I didn't want to remember those two capsules sliding from my hand, dissolving immediately as they struck the water in the goblet.

Nevertheless, Peter's revelation disturbed me. For what had caused Coralie's death, if I had not killed her?

I SPRANG out of bed the next morning humming. Michael would be home late that afternoon, in time for dinner. I opened the blinds, and then I was standing rooted, the song dead on my lips. Slowly I retreated until the edge of the dresser was hurtful, but sharply reassuring, against my back.

My eyes never left the bedside table, never left the brimming cranberry goblet standing upon it.

My heart, that had plunged, began pumping wildly. My horrified gaze wavered with the gently lapping liquid in the goblet's bowl. First one side, then the other. Gently, but with a mesmeric insistence that was hideous to behold.

My thoughts circled wildly, like hunted things seeking escape. Why? Oh, why? And how did it get here again?

But I knew. Again I sensed that invisible presence in the apparently empty room. And again I called out softly.

"Coralie?"

The liquid in the goblet lapped still more insistently against the convex sides. I was sure, then. Certain the goblet contained the same lethal dose it had held the last time Coralie had lifted it to her lips.

"You want me to drink?" I whispered. "Is that it, Coralie? You want me to drink?"

Slowly my trembling legs gave way, and I sank to the carpet. I wouldn't drink. I never, never would. Ah, God, why did she punish me so? *I* hadn't killed her. Peter said so.

I crouched there sobbing, but presently my courage returned sufficiently so that I could get on my feet and approach the cranberry goblet. I dreaded to touch the thing, but gingerly I took it, and again emptied its contents.

I knew I must get rid of it, quickly, before Michael came back. It was wearing me down. One of these mornings, fear might even force me to tell Michael what I had done.

I shuddered.

I tottered down the hall, and clawed through the closet impatiently until I found an empty carton. Placing the goblet within, I wrapped the package securely with trembling hands and addressed it to a fictitious name and street number in Los Angeles. And I placed no return address on the wrapper.

I hurried with it to the postoffice and my depression didn't lift until I'd pushed it through the slot marked "Parcels."

I was safe. All that afternoon, in my relief, I was almost feverishly excited. It wasn't until I met Michael at the station that my spirits died. For Michael seemed preoccupied still, and his greeting lacked the warmth I expected it to have. Business, I thought.

"Didn't Findlay sign the contract?" I asked.

"What? Oh. Oh, yes, he signed it." Michael returned to gazing moodily out the window of the coupe at the passing shops.

"Aren't you glad to be back?" I persisted.

"Sure, I'm glad," he said listlessly.

His lethargy bothered me. "What's the matter? Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, for God's sake, Ann! Cut out the nagging!" he snapped irritably. But when I'd subsided into hurt silence, he reached over and covered my hand on the wheel with his. "I'm sorry. Guess I'm tired."

But there was something wrong. I knew it.

While he showered, I put the dinner on the table. I still hadn't replaced Mrs. Dunnigan with someone else, and I was doing the work myself—badly enough. But it was fun, in a way. My mistakes made me feel very inefficient and bride-like.

BY A miracle, the dinner was surprisingly good. Under its influence, the lines of strain slowly became erased from Michael's face. And I relaxed for the first time in days. Surely I had nothing to fear, now that Michael was with me again. We were talking and laughing, almost on the old footing, when it happened.

Michael lifted his glass to drink. I saw him lift it. One instant my breath held in disbelief. Then I was screaming hysterically, "Put it down! Put it down!"

That wasn't the plain crystal water glass I'd placed on the table! There, just two inches from Michael's lips, was the cranberry goblet!

Michael's startled eyes went from me to the goblet, and when he saw what it was that he held in his hand, he swore softly. With his face turning a leaden gray, he set the thing back on the table with a hand that shook.

"The goblet!" he muttered. "I cannot escape it. It was there, even in St. Louis."

Oh, I hadn't thought she'd strike at me through Michael, whom I loved! I couldn't —I dare not fight her any more.

I was standing, half-swaying. "I didn't kill her, Michael! I put those two capsules in the goblet, but Peter said—"

Michael's face was grim, stony.

"Don't look at me like that!" I pleaded. "Three weren't enough to kill her, but—"

"She *died*," Michael said strangely. "Died, because I, too, dropped two capsules in Coralie's glass that last morning."

My breath caught. I couldn't understand. Michael had loved Coralie! What was he saying?

"Don't you think I saw what she'd been doing all along, working to destroy our marriage?" His face was cold, implacable. "I knew what Coralie was capable of. Why, when she was a child—" He broke off. "It doesn't matter now. But she never fooled me. Never. I had a right to some happiness. And that was why I killed her."

Why *we* killed her. Five capsules, I thought dully. Five had been enough.

Michael picked up the cranberry goblet. Looking around for some place to throw its contents, he finally poured the liquid into the bowl of zinnias on the table.

"Come," he said then, the goblet still in his hand. "We'll make an end of it."

We were turning away from the table when I whispered, "Look!"

The zinnias were wilting, turning to gray ash that drifted on the damask cloth.

In the living room, Michael threw the goblet into the empty fireplace, where it shattered. With the poker he pulverized the remaining fragments. It was done. He came to me then, and caught me in his arms. And I found myself shrinking. Shrinking from his embrace, even though I knew he was no worse than myself.

But I could hear Coralie's voice again, saying, "Even if I lose, I'll win."

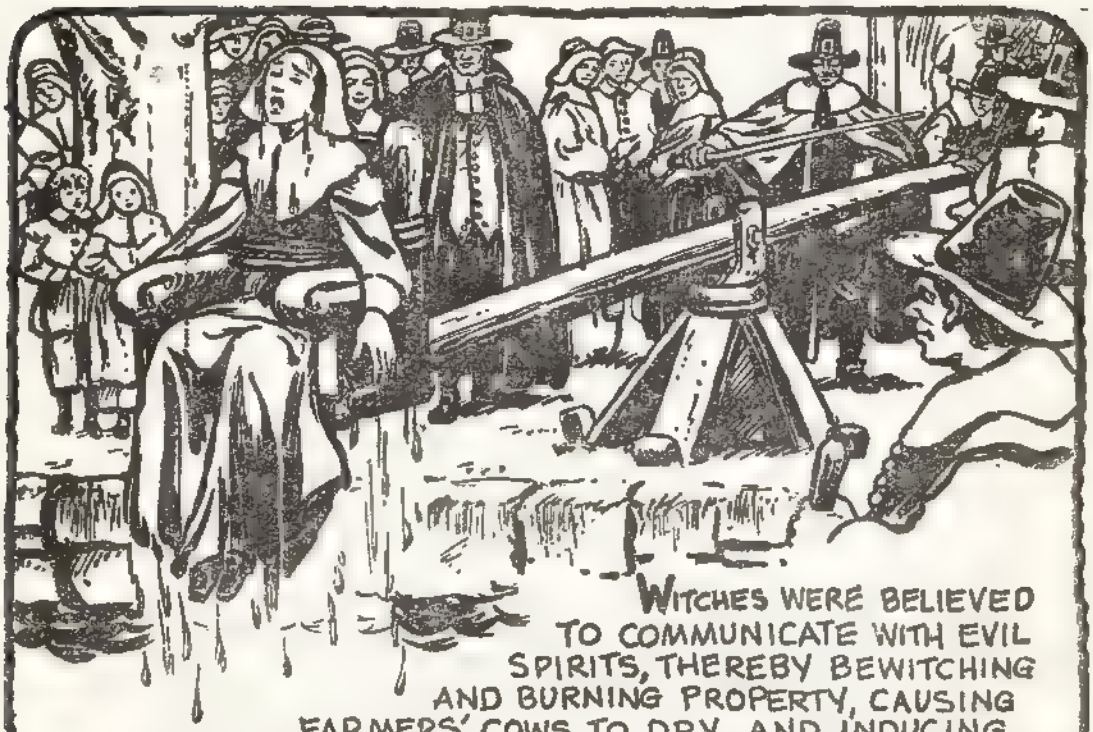
Clever Coralie, cruel Coralie. Together we have killed her, and together we had killed whatever future we might have had for ourselves. There is no love without trust, and there'll be no trust, ever, between Michael and me. There'll be no children now, for Michael and me—children whose parents were murderers.

Slowly we went back to the dining room. And it was there, glowing evilly red on the table, its contents lapping invitingly, insistently. We stood there looking at it, feeling no surprise. Only an infinite weariness. We can never destroy it. It will be with us always.

You'll never give up, will you, Coralie? I know that now. Know it as certainly as I know that the day will finally come when Michael and I, goaded beyond endurance, will drink as you desire—from the cranberry goblet.

Superstitions and Taboos

By Weill



WITCHES WERE BELIEVED TO COMMUNICATE WITH EVIL SPIRITS, THEREBY BEWITCHING AND BURNING PROPERTY, CAUSING FARMERS' COWS TO DRY, AND INDUCING CONVULSIONS IN CHILDREN. THEY WERE THOUGHT TO RENDER THEMSELVES INVISIBLE IN COMMITTING DEADLY TORTURES; AND THEIR DEALINGS WITH SATAN *WERE SUPPOSED TO MAKE THEM* ***TOO LIGHT TO SINK IN WATER***

SAILORS IN NORTH ENGLAND PURCHASED FAVORABLE WINDS BY BUYING A SPECIAL ROPE WITH THREE KNOTS IN IT. TO LOOSEN ONE KNOT WAS THOUGHT TO LOOSEN A LIGHT WIND. TWO WERE LOOSENED FOR A BREEZE, AND THREE FOR HALF A GALE.

TO HAVE KNOTS ABOUT THE PERSON WAS CONSIDERED VERY UNLUCKY, PARTICULARLY DURING A MARRIAGE CEREMONY *AS IT WAS BELIEVED* ***TO AFFECT FUTURE FERTILITY***

The Murderous Steam Shovel

By ALLISON V. HARDING

YOU know those stories—you've read them—where people set things down for the record in notebooks. I don't do that. This story is in my mind. I go over it detail by detail and I can remember the whole business. And the remembering assures me that I am not crazy, that all this did happen. People who have seen things and had things happen that other folks don't experience are called crazy. It's the easiest way—and the most reassuring!

So I go over and over the story in my mind, and I say, Vilma—that's my name—here's just what has happened to you from the beginning, and because it's all so clear and distinct—you're not crazy!

It all started with that construction job just above the Northville Valley country, or maybe it all started when I married Ed Meglund.

Ed had always been in construction. He had the build for it, big hands, big frame, two hundred pounds of muscle and sinew on it, not so much between the ears. But you know the song, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"! Even I, Vilma, and his wife, wouldn't exactly have ever called Ed good. The outfit he'd worked for was Greene Construction and as Ed had never had much education, they gave him the jobs you could tell he could do just by looking at him, driving a ballast truck or digging or shoveling or using his strength and weight somehow.

He made a fair salary and we lived in Northville pretty comfortably. But I remember the night he came home and said they had a shovel on the job now, a big new tractor steam shovel, he told me. Ed's hard blue eyes lit up and I could tell the way a wife can without any speaking that what Ed Meglund wanted to do more than anything in the world was to run that shovel. That's a better job, of course, with more money and getting looked up to.

I never asked very many questions of Ed because he doesn't answer unless it pleases him, but I could tell from his face at home nights that he wasn't getting any closer to that old steam shovel. One Sunday when we were driving around up in the Northville Valley country, he toured me past the construction site and pointed.

"There he is, Vilma."

Well, one steam shovel looks about the same to me as another with those caterpillar feet and the operator's house and then the scoop that comes out so, you know. A woman never sees the same in them as a man does. Ed was just bubbling over.

"Isn't he a beaut!"

I read the letters that ran across the coping near the roof. Greene Construction Company, I made out.

"We call him Big Mike."

"That's a name for a derrick," I sniffed. "Howdya get that?"

"Oh, I dunno," replied Ed. "But isn't that a beaut!" he sighed.

"If you like 'em," I murmured.

It wasn't very many weeks after that that Ed came into our little place in Northville and announced suddenly we were going to move up toward the valley.

"Huh?" was all I got out.

He told me he had a cottage that he'd found for rent not far from the construction site.

"But most of the rest of the crowd lives around here," I protested, thinking that my afternoons of gossip with the construction wives would be hard to come by if I was set down up in some shack in the woods.

But there's Ed for you. He had an idea in that thick skull and he was off after it. I said, "Why?" He said nothing. I said, "Why?" After twice that was enough. Ed had his reasons.

The cottage was all one floor, a big living-dining room, bedroom, porch, and a

That there steam shovel's built to dig, Brother—dig graves!

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

little garage sticking out like something they'd pasted on as an afterthought. It was lonely and the nearest neighbors' house was God knows how far away and I wasn't so keen about *that*. The ground was low here making the atmosphere dampish and the earth rich and soft. We were only a mile or so from the construction site and the convenience of its nearness was, I thought, the main reason for our moving.

But instead of being pleased by the change, Ed seemed to grow more uncommunicative and moody. His dissatisfaction centered around someone who'd come in to run the steam shovel.

"Guy named Ronsford. Got some high and mighty college education so they put him operating Big Mike instead of giving me the job."

I could see the current state of affairs and this man Ronsford were eating away at my husband.

Time passed and the path of construction widened and headed toward us so that during the day when I sat on the porch reading or listening to the radio, I could hear the sounds from the crew and I came to know the noise Big Mike made. There was nothing else up there, tractors or trucks, that had the heavy, deep-throated rumbling and vibrating of the huge steam shovel. On Sundays we often drove past the excavations.

"He keeps Big Mike all polished up," Ed growled, and even I could notice how shiny the steam shovel was, its cab where the operator sat on the left side resplendent under a new coat of red paint.

Ed mumbled a lot under his breath those days and what I could mainly make out was the word "Ronsford." He hated the shovel's operator, swore there was an unholy allegiance between the man and machine.

It was along about the first week in June that Ronsford disappeared. There was a lot of noise and investigation but no clews. Nobody'd known too much about him beforehand except that he had a mechanical engineering degree and some good references. The construction boss just figured he'd skipped out all of a sudden. There was no evidence of foul play, and it wasn't too much later that Ed came home and told me of a conversation he had with the boss.

His big, broad face lit up, "So he says to me, Vilma, he says, 'Meglund, you been watchin' that steam shovel and fussin' around with it for quite a while now. Think you can take on the job?' "

Ed clapped his hands together almost like a kid. "Waddya think of that, Vilma?"

Yeah, what I thought! I can also remember that almost directly Ed began to run Big Mike there were funny things went on over at the construction site, and I don't mean humorous!. Ed would come home and tell me, "That shovel's a devil, Vilma. A big tough baby, and he's got a mind of his own. I was standing under him this morning and that shovel started to come down right on top. If the boss hadn't looked up, we would've both been smashed like that," and he plunked the flat of his hand down on the table hard.

"Course the motor was idling but the cables were locked. I dunno how it happened."

This and other things. Big Mike stuttered and stalled when they were trying to push ahead the fastest. Once it used its teeth on one of the diggers, breaking two ribs and a shoulder, and of course Ed took the blame. All his elation was going and I secretly was sorry Big Mike had ever rumbled and trundled onto the scene. But it was evident to me that Ed wouldn't be running the shovel very much longer the way things were happening.

YES, it sure was a bad day Big Mike had turned up! Just how bad I didn't realize until an evening a month after Ronsford had disappeared. We'd gone to bed early and I was lying there listening to the night noises, those things, whatever you call them, that chirp and squeak outside as though they never got any sleep. I could tell from his breathing that Ed was awake too, and I guessed he was worrying how much longer they'd let him have his shovel. Or maybe he was worrying about other things.

I don't know which one of us heard the noise first but it didn't mean so much to me. Just a rumbling far off in the distance like a freight train makes crossing a distant

bridge at night. Then Ed said—I remember his exact words—"Vilma, you awake?"

"Sure," I answered.

"Funny noise," he went on, and we both listened.

The rumbling continued off in the distance. Then it seemed a little louder, or maybe the wind had shifted. We both lay there in the dark listening. Certainly, whatever it was, it was getting louder and it came to have a familiarity, but it was Ed who said, "Vilma, that's construction equipment. It's Big Mike!"

And I remember as he said it there was wonder in his voice, no more than that, just . . . wonder.

I asked, "What are they doing up there? Working any sort of night shift?"

"Naw. I'd know if they were."

Then in a few more seconds, "That noise is getting louder, isn't it, Vilma?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"Somebody's running the damned machine." Ed started to get out of bed. It's coming this way. What's this? Some kind of joke?"

Suddenly something flashed through my mind. I'm not superstitious. I've never believed in ghosts or such, leaving that for the backwoods folks. But my thoughts tumbled out abruptly the way crazy ideas do at night.

"Ed, you don't suppose it's Ronsford running that machine, that he's come back all of a sudden?'

My husband laughed then, and it was unpleasant with an undertone of meaning.

"Not Ronsford," he replied, and almost boisterously, "Ronsford's not coming back, Old Girl. Maybe somebody's playing some kind of dumb joke but it isn't Ronsford!"

Still the sound bore down on us and the rumbling became a vibrating in the darkness. The crickets and insects and other night noises were swallowed up in it. Our bedroom was south and the construction spot was north.

"I'm gonna investigate," Ed had said, pulling on overshoes and a long coat.

He took a flashlight from the closet and clumped into the living room. I was annoyed by the vibration now. There was an ominous heaviness about it, and as it came closer, the vibrating became a throbbing that dug into your temples almost like a blow. I heard the porch screen door slam and then it was that something made me decide to get up myself. I hastily got on some clothes and went out onto the porch. There was a flicker of light somewhere outside. That would be Ed. And beyond through the night came this bellowing, throbbing sound. There was an eerie awfulness about it. I realized I was shaking although the night was warm.

There was a rim of thin woods some ways across the field that stretched in front of the cottage. I could hear timber cracking in the wake of the rumbling. Ed's flashlight beamed forward, and although I expected it, it was a shock to see the giant outline of the steam shovel emerge like some prehistoric monster from the trees at the field's edge. It was too far away and too dark to make out the details, but I was sure it was Big Mike. The red operator's cab told me that.

The steam shovel continued forward, Ed's flashlight upon it, until it reached a spot halfway between the woods and our place. It stopped there and amazingly the shovel arm reached down and forward, the jagged biting teeth ripping into the earth. I heard my husband curse and yell then above the noise of the motor. The shovel's scoop came up full of earth and the trap under the scoop opened and dirt fell, only there was something else. Something that caught for a moment and then dropped like a long full sack . . . or a human body!

My husband screamed again, only instead of anger, the sound of his voice was now filled with animal fear. The beam of his flash flicked away from the steam shovel and the bobbing light told me he was racing toward the house. Big Mike's motor roared as it too came forward, a black hulk moving at incredible speed.

I WRENCHED myself free from the bands of fear that were tied around my throat and legs pinning me to the porch and ran through the cottage to the back door. I stumbled over something and went down hard. I threw the carelessly left rake aside and got up, my ankle paining. I heard the screen door on the other side of the house jerk open and my husband's scream-

ing voice. I was on my feet by now and hobbling away as fast as my injured ankle would let me. Behind, the screams of fear continued and then came a sudden shocking splintering of wood as though the house were being torn up by its very roots. The rumbling sounds were fused with the splintering and crashing of timbers. There was one more terrible cry from my husband and then silence except for the splintering and crashing of the machine that was running amuck in our cottage.

The pain from my ankle made me feel faint and I was glad for the cool rain that began to fall. I looked behind once more and saw that the destructive rampage of the metal monster had started a fire in the remains of the cottage. Against the red flickering light I saw the bulk of Big Mike standing there. Pieces of painted wood and beaverboard from the wreckage festooned on its sides and broken over its shovel, and the conflagration, as it flamed up in the remains of the house, showed me more.

The shovel came to rumbling life, circling around the house to return the way it had come. As it did, the operator's cab was thrown in strong relief against the flames and in the cab—I swear it, I am very sure of this—there was no one! No one, I tell you. The cab was empty!

I GUESS I fainted then for I remember no more until I came to in a neighbor's house where I had been brought by the volunteer firemen who had been summoned to the blaze. It was hours afterward and no one would listen to my story. A doctor kept forcing sedatives on me. Although nobody would tell me at the time, I found out later that no trace of my husband had been found. The cheap wooden house had burned completely and only the torrential rain that had come up luckily right afterward had prevented the fire from spreading to the surrounding trees and woods.

I tried to tell them about Big Mike but everybody looked very stern and disbelieving. The more I tried, the more medicine I was given.

Finally, I was taken to the Northville Hospital. Gradually it dawned on me no one believed my story. The construction boss himself came to see me, and tearfully I begged him to listen to me but he shook his head and turned away.

"That's absurd, Vilma. You've just been through a terrible experience. Big Mike was right where he always is the next morning and certainly there would've been tractor marks around your place."

Of course there would have, I thought.

"Weren't there?" I asked.

"No," he replied definitely.

Then the explanation came to me. The unusually heavy rainfall in that soft earth. That would obliterate the marks of treads. But he set his lips in a thin stern line, shook his head, and just said, "I'd better go now."

There were police officers who came, and I was glad the nurse never gave them more than a few minutes with me. They asked me endless questions about my husband and about Ronsford. It seems the body of the missing steam-shovel operator had been found lying out in the rain-filled field. It was obvious from his condition that the man had been dead for at least a month and that he had met his end violently. I knew then, of course, without too great surprise that my husband had murdered Ronsford. But that seemed to me so trivial beside the living menace of Big Mike.

After a while a doctor came in to talk to me. A psychologist or something, I was told he was. I tried again desperately to tell him what had happened that night, to try and make him believe. But I realized the more I talked, the more that set, decided expression came over his face. I was struck with a new fear then. Let them think me crazy. I didn't care. But I had to get out of Northville or somehow Big Mike would come down here. Even in the village hospital I didn't feel safe. Why, we were barely nine miles from the construction site. I had to get out, somewhere, anywhere.

So several days later when the hospital doctor and the psychologist asked me to sign a paper agreeing to go to a "sanitarium," I complied happily. I knew this was a—well, to put it bluntly—an insane asylum but I also knew that I wasn't crazy. But if I stayed here, that rumbling metal monster would get me.

The place to which I allowed myself to be committed voluntarily was no state booby hatch. We'd had a little money put away

upon which I now felt free to draw. And the semi-private sanitarium was thankfully out at the other side of the state several hundred miles away.

I REMEMBER the day I left Northville. The day had been hot, the sky was suffused with mistiness, and as we went out into the street to get into the taxi that would go to the station, I noticed that one of those sudden summer storms was coming up. My traveling companion was a male nurse, or maybe I should say, attendant. As we trundled away from the hospital, the beginnings of a feeling of relief stole over me. The streets grew darker suddenly, and then in the distance there was a rumbling. At first, like on that horrendous night, I could not identify the sound, but suddenly the fear came to me, catching me by the throat, that it was Big Mike, that he was after me, that he'd never let me leave Northville.

I guess maybe I leaned forward a bit on the taxi seat, for when there was a flash of lightning, big fat droplets of water exploded against the taxi window and I sank back with relief, I noticed that the attendant was looking at me closely. Of course, the rumbling had been thunder. Probably Big Mike was up beyond the other end of town shoveling away busily, all thoughts of me gone from his metal mind.

Still I was glad to get on the express, glad with every mile that clicked off as we headed across the state. The male nurse—his name was Simpson, I learned—was a nice enough fellow, but he was always eyeing me as though he half expected me to do something strange. The joke, of course, was on them, for I was escaping from something or someone who had had it in for the Meglunds, whether Ronsford's ghost or not, I didn't know or care. I just knew there was some terrible menace back in Northville. It had gotten Ed and I didn't want it to get me. Also, my "condition" had cut short the nosy police questioning. I can say with a clear conscience that I had nothing directly to do with the death of Ronsford.

Oh, I suppose I knew what was going to happen, my husband being the kind of man he was, brooding around about wanting to operate that damn shovel, and nights he'd skulk around outside in the woods between the little rented cottage and the construction site. But honest to God, I never knew the real story. Ed didn't last long enough to tell me. Sure, I heard him digging out there one night in the soft earth and it was the next day that Ronsford was just gone. But Vilma's not the one to stick her nose into other people's business. That steam-shovel job brought more money too, and that was okay by me. You think a girl wants to grow old and never have any of the nice things? You're crazy. Let Ed be the big shot and run the steam shovel, I thought. I'll take the extra dough, and if he keeps his mouth shut, I'll keep my mouth shut. So I couldn't be implicated in anything as unpleasant as murder, could I?

Five hours across the state and out at Belfast, a dozing little village considerably smaller than Northville. We climbed off the railroad coach and I stood on the platform watching the train puff away into the soft summer evening, leaving behind a plume of lightish brown smoke that dispersed slowly in the heavy air. Simpson had engaged a cab and we and my luggage distributed ourselves around its interior.

I remember that drive with crystal clearness. The country in this part of the state is flatter, but in spite of it, the land is beautiful. I looked around with greater interest than I had shown in anything for weeks and Simpson seemed pleased with my remarks about the beautiful trees and flowers.

BYERLY HOME was a scant fifteen-minute ride from the depot, and as we wound up its dirt driveway, the thought came to me that after all a life such as the one I had embarked on since that fateful night had its advantages. There were no responsibilities, no decisions to make, no personal crises, just a regular schedule, care, relaxation.

As though to second my unspoken thoughts, when we drew up at the whiteboard main building, we were met by two people, a man and woman, the woman dressed in ordinary clothes and the man having about him no hint of the medical except for the peeping end of a stethoscope in his coat pocket.

Simpson got out first with my luggage, and the woman, who was introduced to me as Miss Meadows, took me by the arm very kindly and led me up onto the porch and inside.

"You must be tired," she said in a soothing voice.

My room, I found, was at the extreme end of the house on the second floor and over the deep porch that spread three quarters of the way around the wooden building.

I remember that first night at Byerly's Home. I'd had supper down in the main dining room, and as far as I could see, it was such like the dining room of any country inn or hotel. To be sure, a woman at one of the tables in the corner had started to cry. Convulsive sobs that were not pretty to hear, but Miss Meadows and another woman had gone over and helped her out of the room. Nobody else seemed to pay much attention.

I remember my dominant thought that night. Here I was, perfectly safe. The others there might be worried about how they could get out. I patted myself on the back for being at a place where nobody, nothing, could get in—nosy police officers, or anything else.

I had several sessions with Dr. Blake. I told him what had happened that night back at Northville, the night Big Mike stampeded after us, killed Ed, and tried to get me too, and I could see the same thinly veiled look of incredulity on Blake's face that I had seen on the physician's face back at Northville.

The patients didn't mingle very much, but I took long walks in the surrounding country with Miss Meadows and I had what they called an occupational therapy class where I did some kind of silly weaving.

I remember my third session with Blake. I was trying to tell him about Big Mike, persisting against questions which seemed to me to have nothing to do with that night. The physician was asking me about my previous life, about my childhood, school days, living with Ed, things that as far as I could see, had no bearing on anything. I stubbornly insisted on talking about Big Mike. I saw Blake's lip curl almost in scorn and I realized in a flash the contempt most of these people felt toward anyone deranged.

For of course I knew full well that I was not. I think then I felt a bit sorry for the other patients who were really mentally sick. Well—as sorry as I've ever felt for anyone outside of Vilma.

It definitely seemed to make Blake angry to have me continue to talk about the steam-shovel episode. His parting remark to me as he ushered me out of his upstairs office was, "You know, Mrs. Meglund, you have to help us—help you!"

THAT night I did some long and deep thinking. You're still young, Vilma, I told myself. After all, you *are* in a nut house now. You don't want to say here all the rest of your years, do you, Kid? I realized Byerly Home had had a purpose. It had been the right thing for me to do to come here, but from now on my ticket was to cut out the Big Mike talk. Nobody believed it. The biggest joke of all—and I swear this wasn't wishful thinking—I began to wonder, myself.

That experience in the recent past had been so horrible that my mind—under the shock of Ed's death and the Ronsford business—had kind of thought up a lot of things that, well, maybe weren't so. I'd poked here and there in my mind for the memory of the official explanation of that night as given me in the Northville Hospital by the solicitous doctor when I'd come to. Ed had died in the fire. Somehow I'd gotten out, and that was that.

I suited my conduct to my plan of action. I said no more about Big Mike. I was myself completely, except for putting on a bit of palaver with the nurses and doctors. I think I was beginning to fool them. I knew I was the day Dr. Blake called me and said:

"Mrs. Meglund, it seems to us that your condition has taken a turn for the better. You had a very great shock, a shock of the sort that can temporarily, shall we say, affect one's mind, but we feel you've weathered the storm rather well. I think the time is coming when you will be able to go back out into the world.

"Oh, perhaps there will be relapses. You will have fears and anxiety, and I should certainly suggest that you keep in occasional touch with someone who understands your

problem, at least for a while. But on the whole your picture looks quite rosy, Mrs. Meglund."

He beamed, obviously taking the full credit himself. As I left his office, turning over in my mind the words I would have liked to have said to him, telling him what a stupid little man he was, telling him how I'd fooled them all, and now when I chose it, they thought I'd gone from sickness to wellness, I realized I was no longer afraid of anything outside, even of Big Mike.

That much of Blake's explanations probably was true. I'd built up this thing, and of course it was impossible. It was absurd! I sat in my room feeling very satisfied, drumming my fingers against the ledge and looking out. It was very early fall now, and the trees and shrubbery were beginning to lose some of their lush greenness. I hadn't wanted to seem eager to Blake. I hadn't wanted to say, "Doctor, when can I get out of this joint and the sooner the better!"

It would fit the whole picture better if I continued to let him play the big shot, to let him think he'd guided me along.

Three days later in the morning Blake sent for me.

"Mrs. Meglund," he greeted me, "I feel you can go home anytime now. Have you plans? Perhaps you'll return to Northville."

I TOLD him, no, I didn't think I'd do that. There was a little money left from my husband's insurance, I mentioned candidly, and I thought I'd travel a bit.

"Good," he nodded sagely. "When would you like to leave?"

I bit my lip and kept "Today, as soon as possible," from popping out.

"Oh, sometime tomorrow afternoon," I suggested with an airy wave of my hand as though I really didn't care to leave at all.

Vilma's smart don't you think?

"Tomorrow afternoon? Splendid!" echoed Dr. Blake.

He talked to me further then for well over an hour, I'd say, and I struggled to keep any trace of boredom from my expression. He wrung my hand.

"I'll make all the necessary arrangements."

I left his office, for the last time I knew, and with my head turned away, I could feel the smirk of satisfaction ooze across my face.

As I walked through the corridor toward the wing, I contemplated with what I thought was justifiable glee, the life that lay ahead of me. And not having Ed holding me back was more advantage than disadvantage. I'd get by and more!

I CLIMBED the one flight to my room. I supposed I'd better start getting some of my things together, but it was nearly lunchtime. I'd wait until afterward. I went to the window, looked out idly—and something hit me in the pit of the stomach. For there, the top of its upper structure almost on a level with my eyes, was Big Mike! I'd know that steam shovel anywhere! The red operator's cab on the left side, the rest of it drab-painted, the big bucket shovel—everything came back to me then.

The memory, the hysterical fear, the knowledge, yes, the definite knowledge that this was not something of dead steel and iron but an inspired, thinking, murderous monster!

"Miss Meadows!" I tried to take the edge of screaming out of my voice. "Miss Meadows!"

I heard the nurse's heavy steps on the stairs outside my room. My nails bit into the palms of my hands as I fought for control. Miss Meadows came into the room.

"What's the matter, dear?"

I pointed out the window. "What's that doing out there?" I tried to keep my voice steady.

The nurse looked. "Oh, didn't you know? We're going to excavate to build onto this wing. It's just a steam shovel, my dear."

I knew she was taking in my white face and I put my hands behind my back to hide their trembling. But despite my efforts, fear ran away with me. I sat down suddenly on my bed because of the weakness in my knees.

"Miss Meadows," I gasped. "I've got to get out of here quickly, as soon as possible? Dr. Blake is letting me go. We decided on tomorrow, but I want to get out of here today. I want to leave now! Please, oh, please!"

Miss Meadows had the usual answer, a pat on the shoulder, the same "Now just

take it easy, dear. You stay here and I'll talk to Dr. Blake."

I sat there and the minutes ticked away. I didn't want to get up and look again. I didn't want to see Big Mike, ever. I'd thought I never would see him again and here he was, and with him, the fear that choked me at the throat. Finally, I heard two pairs of steps coming up the stairs of the wing. Dr. Blake came in followed by Miss Meadows.

"What's all this about, Mrs. Meglund?"

I made a mighty effort.

"I . . . I just decided I wanted to leave today, Doctor."

I realized the danger of my position as Miss Meadows murmured, "The steam shovel outside seems to upset her, Doctor."

Blake looked out the window. He managed a hearty laugh.

"Is that true, Mrs. Meglund? Does that metal eyesore out there worry you?" He answered his own question. "Of course not. There's an unpleasant association, I dare say, but these are the things you must control."

I gripped the edge of the bed tightly.

"Can I please leave today, Doctor?"

He frowned a bit impatiently.

"I've made all the arrangements for tomorrow, Mrs. Meglund. You've been with us quite a few weeks, you know. Certainly you can put up with us one more day."

"It's just that I . . . that I have to go today!"

THEY were both looking at me sharply and I lowered my head. I could feel the hysterical tears course down my cheeks now. The doctor crossed to the bed and gripped me firmly by the shoulder.

"Now this is absurd," his voice was stern. "You've got to get ahold of yourself. I have just certified you as on the road to recovery. You're not going to make me reverse my prognosis, are you? Please stand up."

I did, and he led me to the window.

"Face this thing and understand what it *is*."

I looked. I looked at the cables and the machinery and the huge tub of a shovel, the cruel teeth that were slack, waiting—and by my side, Dr. Blake's voice droned on—"Don't you see it's all association . . . that unpleasant night . . . the death of your husband . . . shock. . . ."

The monster, Big Mike, down there had a face and the face was looking at me grinning. The shovel was its mouth, the cab a red, baleful eye fixed on my window. I screamed then, whirled and ran for the door. I had to get away. That was all that mattered. I had to! I had to!

The shock of Miss Meadow's heavy body brought me back to reality somewhat as the nurse stepped in front of me just before I reached the door, and threw her strong arms expertly around me. I realized then that I could never convince these people, or anyone else, about Big Mike, for to convince them of that would be to convince them of my insanity. One was so and one was not so, only I knew that. I had to get away now.

I struggled and writhed in the nurse's arms. My nails raked the square unimaginative face in front of my own. Meadows grunted in pain and stepped away momentarily but Dr. Blake had me by the arm and was calling down the stairs. I twisted desperately and jerked myself free. But crowding up the stairs now were two more nurses and a male attendant. I believe then I was out of my head for I threw myself down the stairs at them. The women went down under my weight with shrill cries of alarm and pain, but the male attendant caught me and held my arms to my sides as though I were a child. I kicked but it did no good.

I was taken back into my room, Dr. Blake discreetly shutting the door behind us. Then I was put to bed in a restraining sheet. Do you know what they are? I'd seen them used for other patients, never guessing, never thinking— You can hardly move once you are in one. You can't get away and your bed is the trap. You can wiggle and struggle and thresh and fight but you're held as though in a sack. Your head is out and you can move it but your arms and legs are securely imprisoned.

Dr. Blake forced me to take a sedative then, and after a while, one by one the attendant, Blake, and the three nurses left the room.

I would go to sleep now, I understood from their talk.

Miss Meadows was the last to go, her

bovine indifferent face looking back at me from the door. In a drowsy way—for the sedative was beginning to work—I was glad for the nail marks on her cheek. A black pit of unconsciousness opened up for me then as I slipped off into drugged sleep.

I don't know how long it was before I woke up. It must have been quite a few hours, for darkness had fallen. I finally figured that it had to be fairly late because the small sounds of the sanitarium kept up during the early evening were now all absent. I struggled briefly but the restraining sheet was still my complete master. I was thirsty, cramped, and very uncomfortable. I had to get out of this thing. I called. I screamed, and after an eternity I heard steps upon the stairs. My door opened and someone lit the light at my bedside. It was Miss Meadows. I swore at her, I cried, I pleaded, and she just looked at me silently. I could see her gaze was professional, to ascertain whether I was still snug and safe—safe, that was a good one—in the restraining sheet.

Satisfied, she snapped out the light and without answering any of my pleas to be let up, went out the door. I heard her steps descending the long stairs, and then there was the deep silence of late night.

I FOUGHT with myself then, using the weapons Dr. Blake had given me, things I had laughed at once but used now against my fear of the steam shovel. So what if Big Mike had come across the state for this job. There were reasons, logical reasons probably. It had nothing to do with me or the steam shovel. The Greene Construction Company was pretty big. Maybe Big Mike was the only kind of shovel that could do this particular kind of job at Byerly Home. That last thought had an ominous significance. *Big Mike was the only kind of steam shovel that could do this job!*

Then came what I had been waiting for, what I knew would come, what I knew deep down I'd hear again ever since that first night I'd heard it in Northville. The tractor motor of Big Mike starting up, rumbling into life, vibrating and throbbing! The first sounds of the treads turning over as they scraped and bruised the earth, coming toward my window. Sounds no less horrible because I denied them and at the same time tried to drown them out with my own screams. The deep-throated combustion of Big Mike's engine was deafening now. It reverberated beneath me on the porch ceiling, which was also my own floor.

Then a new sound, a tautening of cables, the winch crying, steel against steel as the shovel part extended delicately and felt, felt through the darkness for what it wanted.

I prayed for unconsciousness and perhaps my prayers or my mad, frenzied struggles to get loose from the restraining sheet that held me caused me to become suddenly lightheaded and faint. As I lay limp with a deeper blackness than of night exploding inside my eyeballs and head, there was still the last edge of consciousness, of life that registered crystal clear the thunderous sounds of Big Mike. The tearing, ripping shock of the shovel teeth at the wood under my bed, the close-by growl and snarl of this immortal monster, the sudden sickening feeling of crashing impact . . . of being scooped upward at great speed . . . and then . . . nothing!

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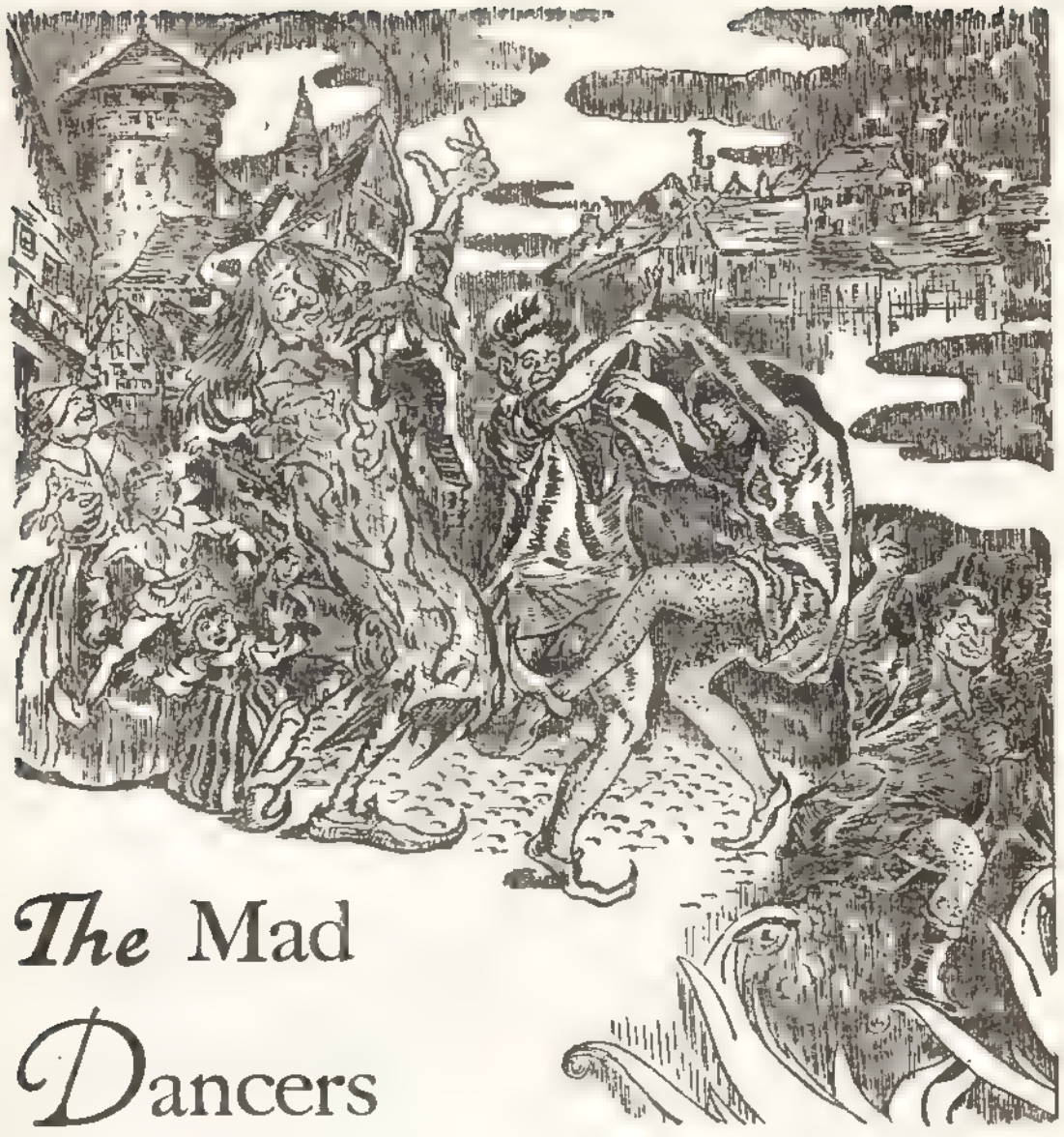

The Mad Dancers

"The effects of the Black Plague had not yet subsided, and the graves of millions of its victims were scarcely closed, when a strange delusion arose in Germany . . . called the dancing *mania."*—Epidemics of the Middle Ages.

—J. F. C. Hecker.

THOUGH it was early of an evening in June, the horizontal rays of the sun still caught the cupola of the Octagonal Chapel in Aix-la-Chapelle. It was the eve of St. John's, 1374, and in the streets preparations for the festival were under way. Deserted, however, was the interior of the chapel, except for Christian and Mina, holding hands and standing quietly in the center, the boy gazing at the floor, the girl looking upward.

A beam from the sun had struck through one of the little windows above the gallery, caught a portion of the great chandelier of gilded copper, presentation of Frederick Barbarossa more than 200 years before, and the reflections had spread through the whole structure so that it caught and dazzled the wondering eyes of Mina.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

The plague swept on across the land with a dread meaning surely known only to the Devil

But it was the slab at their feet upon which Christian was reflecting. It bore the simple inscription, *Carlo Magno*. By the strict measure of time, Christopher Columbus is less remote to us of 1945 than Charlemagne was to Christian Nohl's generation. To this young student, however, Charlemagne was very real. Christian knew more about Charlemagne than did anyone else in Aix-la-Chapelle, but that was natural for one whose thirst for knowledge was so great. These, however, were the Dark Ages, and it was not entirely respectable to extend one's knowledge beyond the dogmas of the church.

Christian wanted to be, of all things, a physician. So it was gossiped about, though his friends and relatives tried to hush it. Since the papal bull of Boniface VIII forbidding the boiling of human bones, physiology was rather at a standstill. Christian's mother's brother, however, was head of the medical faculty at the University of Paris, which being 200 years old had a good reputation; and it was known that Christian's uncle desired him as a pupil.

But, so great a man was Charlemagne, thought Christian. "If only the things he had stood for had survived," he said aloud.

"Yes," replied Mina abstractedly, still enraptured by the chandelier.

"What pity," he went on dreamily, "that

By
ROGER S. VREELAND

it all died here with him. He knew what glory there was in knowledge, and he wanted every one to share in it. And he had faith in the science of healing. What he started could have done so much for us, had there not been some power opposed to man's rising. Mina"—he tightened his hand about hers as he always did when enthusiastic—"there are ways of working with nature. I so want to learn the art of healing, I hope that Dr. Planquette will accept me."

"But come, Christian. We must go or we'll be scolded for tarrying until after dark."

Out they went into the cobblestone court. Pretty Mina's yellow flowing hair lay smooth to her head under a light coronet. Her linen robe, sleeveless and tight-fitting to the hips, spread into a loose full skirt. Christian, also blond, and a few inches taller, was attired typically for his day—a slim tunic ending at his knees, broad ornamented waist belt, and long hose. His low shoes, with long up-pointed toes, were fastened over the instep with silver clasps.

They were not alone in the court, for other young people, carrying wood and paraphernalia, were coming from many directions noisy with laughter. Already one fire was burning. In another place a dried out tree was being set up and a group of boys supervised by a man was having a time with a large squirming sack. It contained all the cats that could be found in the neighborhood.

CHRISTIAN and Mina walked slowly by, watching with interest, but with no plan to join. The bag of cats was tied to the tree and the tree set afire.* As it blazed up, hilarious screams of the young people rose throughout the court. Mina was morbidly fascinated, but Christian drew her away. They strolled on toward their homes, until they came to another square. Here a bonfire was blazing full and the festivities were well under way. This being their own neighborhood, friends spied them and shouted to them—

"Christian!—Mina! Our *Johannisfeur* is started! Come and jump with us!"

"Oh, come, Christian—let us do it," said Mina tugging at his sleeve. "Are you *afraid* to jump with me?"

"But I will jump with her!" said a husky young lad they knew, and snatching Mina he ran with her toward the fire. They clasped arms and in their turn leaped through the *Johannisfeur*. But in their frenzy to avoid being scorched their arms unlinked and they fell sprawling apart on the other side. Someone called jeeringly: "Too bad, Hans, but you cannot snatch a girl so roughly and hope to keep her! A bachelor or you must be for another year!"

With the next couple the boy fell on his seat in the fire amid howls of his friends and howls of his own, though he was quickly pulled out. Mina, who had now fully caught the spirit and was laughing gayly, was rejoined by Christian who led her back to the point whence the running started.

"Christian is going to jump with Mina!" shouted one. Another: "We all know they're in love!" And: "Of course they will marry within a year, so this will prove or disprove the legend!"

They started to run, but Mina with all her laughing and blushing could hardly go. As they approached the fire Christian swept in his arms and holding her tightly leaped high through the blaze—only to slip as he landed. But still he held her. A circle quickly formed and danced around them. In a cacophony of voices they threw prophecies as to when they would be married and how many children they would have. All good-natured fun, just as had been for generations before them.

Later some people with strange faces infiltrated, a little older than the majority. Their clothes were tattered and soiled. But of course they were welcomed. It made no difference. These unknowns, however, were not only strange of face, but strange in manner. Their enthusiasm was wild, lacking the buoyancy of the others. Coarseness crept into their hilarity; grimness was set on their faces.

These newcomers infused a changed spirit that spread through the entire group like some potent and unwholesome drug. Vulgarity invaded their bacchanalian antics. Contortions of body and face were unnatural, vocalizings were disgusting. Entranced by its own excitement, the crowd was obliv-

* An authentic St. John's Eve custom of the times.

ious of the degree to which it was being carried away. In the vernacular of another age and another country, it would be said that the party was getting rough.

One of the few who sensed the condition rationally was Christian, and he slowly worked his way to the outer edge of the crowd. Mina stayed with him, though she protested—until she looked into his face by the light of the fires that were crackling high, and saw the fright in his eyes.

"Come, Mina," he said. "This is not good, and I don't understand it. The crowd is no longer merry, but crazy. It makes me want to run away."

He guided her into a shadow, and they hurried along a narrow street toward their home.

Amid steep slate roofs, where the houses were all joined together, and gables nearly rubbed noses across the narrow cobblestones, they stopped in front of Mina's house which was but a few doors from Christian's. After whispered goodnights he kissed her and she ran in. He waited until her door was closed tightly, and turned thoughtfully toward his own door.

Little did he suspect the reception awaiting him. His mother threw her arms about his neck, and his father and brothers and sisters stood in the corners with mixed expressions.

"In the name of every saint, what is the matter?" he asked upon catching his breath. "From your faces I can't tell whether you're joyful or anguished!"

Finally his mother held up something small and white.

"A letter from your Uncle Henri!" she announced with sustained excitement.

A few moments later Christian was back at Mina's house.

"My uncle has accepted me!" he told her with trembling enthusiasm. "I am to be one of his pupils in the summer class at the University of Paris. A foot messenger brought the letter today. I am to leave by saddle at dawn tomorrow for Saint-Vith. There I will meet other students with whom I will travel to Paris."

Disappointment spread on Mina's face until she hid it in his tunic.

"I am glad for you," she said. "But sorry for myself. How soon will you return?"

Christian took her in his arms. "That I cannot tell," he repied softly. "It depends, perhaps, on how well Henri Planquette is pleased with me."

"In that case, Christian, I hope you are very stupid!"

LATE the following August, in a gray-stoned room whose one side was an arcade opening into a court, a small but solid old man was the central figure among a handful of younger men seated on rough stools and benches. Wearing a hoodlike *gugel* of soft leather which fell loosely behind his head, the old man was straight and alert for his age. His face, small and square, bearded with a thick curly mat through which he habitually ran his bony fingers, was bright, his eyes, snappy. Dr. Henri Planquette was addressing his students at the University of Paris. One of them had just asked for "the most modern remedy for the stone."

Dr. Planquette replied that there was nothing known better than the method of the late John Gaddesden, whose manuscript *Rosa Anglic** at the Montpellier Medical School he had had the good fortune to peruse. "The prescription," he said, "calls for the collection of some of those beetles found in the dung of oxen; also some crickets. Of the latter, cut off their heads and wings. Deposit the beetles and crickets in a vessel of oil and boil them. Pound the residue and apply to the ailing part.

Several of the students assiduously were scratching notes.

"If there are no more questions for discussion," said the teacher, "this will complete our studies for the day."

But another student arose, one with an uncommonly earnest face.

"So you, too, Christian Nohl, must tax your old uncle on an unpleasantly hot day in order to cram one mite more of knowledge into your head! Well, let us hear."

"I am eager to know if you entertain any theory with regard to this new plague which is spreading out of the Empire from the east."

"You mean *the dancers?*"

"Yes, *the dancers.*"

* First printed in 1492. Gaddesden lived from 1280 to 1361

All students were attentive, for stories about this new plague were disturbing everyone. Furrowing his brow, Dr. Planquette said: "I am of the opinion, and it is a very strong one that this is not entirely a medical matter. I am prone to delegate it to one of the sub-sciences beneath the dignity of medicine. . . ."

An anaemic youth of Slavic accent, named Hynek Zerotin, who was habitually aggressive, interrupted:

"You don't think it might be a nervous disorder of some kind?"

Dr. Planquette shook his head. "Early in the year I was visiting Dresden," he said, "where through a remarkable chance I had a most unusual encounter. But I shall not go into it at this time."

"But Doctor," insisted Hynek impetuously, "don't you think it important that you tell us what you saw? This, after all, primarily is a medical matter if it concerns the health of the people."

Several students voiced agreement, but annoyance crossed the aged teacher's face.

"You think your judgment is sounder than mine? Is that what you are saying?"

Hynek quavered with embarrassment. "I beg your pardon. But I was hopeful I might throw some light on this problem. You see I have connections in Dresden and have spent a good deal of time there. As you suggest, there is a source of influence there that could be connected to this terror."

"In that case," replied Planquette, "might the name *Zcernebob of the Wends* mean something to you?"

Hynek looked startled. He hesitated. "That's it! You know, then!" he said tensely. Turning to his student mates; "This evil disease can be exterminated I am sure. If the doctor thinks so too, I for one shall volunteer to cooperate in whatever manner he deems best."

CHRISTIAN arose again: "I know something of what a terror this epidemic can create," he said, "though what I saw in in Aix-la-Chapelle last St. John's Eve was before it had advanced to this state. I too would cooperate."

The others arose as a body.

So it was that only two months after he had left Aix-la-Chapelle, Christian was on his way back to Germany. But now he was one of a band. Dr. Planquette and seven students were on their way, mounted knights from a court of learning, pledged to destroy the Dancing Mania at its source.

Through the influence of Planquette the University secretly had underwritten the expedition and provided the steeds. Planquette had discussed his plans but meagerly, asking only for confidence in the preliminary stages of the mission. He left his students with no doubt, however, as to whether he knew what he was doing. He provided them with pellets which he compounded in secret, with instructions that they were to be taken only if symptoms of the mania were certain.

Through St. Denis and Soissons their journey was uneventful, but at Reims they encountered the first spectacle of Mad Dancers.

The streets were crowded with men and women of all ranks and ages dancing in a wild and frantic manner. Most seemed to have lost complete control of themselves. Some frothing at the mouth had dropped to the street. Others were dashing their heads against walls and buildings—killing themselves. Here and there were stomachs (mostly of women) repulsively extended, and the desperate souls were trying hysterically to bind their midriffs tight with long strips of cloth. The students discovered later that the victims had brought the swathing with them in expectation of the need. Some groups formed circles. A few stood about by themselves looking heavenward, wildeyed, describing with extravagance the visions they beheld.

Before a church the travelers saw a party of priests conducting the rite of exorcism. But a band of the delirious approached them with curses and drove them into the church —where the priests hurriedly barred the doors.

Those unaffected remained indoors frightened nearly out of their wits. Many of those who ventured forth out of necessity were encumbered with all manner of talismanical paraphernalia for protection. And

* Exorcism, the act of conjuring evil spirits in the name of God out of the person possessed, is a rite of the Catholic Church. Its use in cases of possessions, commonly practiced in the earlier centuries, now is extremely rare and in many diseases is prohibited except with special permission of the bishop. (New International Encyclopedia.)

when the band from Paris reached the cathedral they were admitted only after guards ascertained that they were free of the disease. The great edifice was serving as a refuge. Groups were praying. Not until after their admittance did Dr. Planquette learn with shock that one of their own number had joined the dancers, even though a pair of his companions did everything in their power to stop him. Choosing a citizen of good appearance, Dr. Planquette approached him and queried: "We have just entered the city and are appalled by the sights. What do you make of it?"

"They are demoniacs," replied the citizen. "Their misfortune is due to unworthy priests whose baptism had not sufficient validity to expel the demons. You see, most of the dancers when first possessed attempt to invoke St. John the Baptist. It is the prevailing opinion."

Planquette and his students rested at the cathedral, and started their journey anew the next dawn. It was one hundred miles to the next city, Dinant, and they were weary when they arrived, but the doctor had a friend here in whose home they rested. There were demonstrations in Dinant, too, and another of the party was lost to the dancers.

IT WAS the same story at Huy, Liege, and Maestrucht. By the time they reached Aix-la-Chapelle Planquette, Christian and Hynek Zerotin were the only survivors of the band.

When they entered Christian's native city throngs were reaching the peak of dissolute orgy.

The horrors here were worse than anything they had yet seen. Bloody garments littered the gutters. Men and women were rending their clothes. Many were naked and bleeding. Profligacy was rampant. They leaped into the air shrieking invocations which only the Devil could understand. Their contortions were lascivious and gruesome. Exhausted victims lay about trampled upon while unmolested criminals went about looting and ravishing.

Christian, his uncle, and Hynek became separated, but they had prepared for this contingency by planning to meet at the cathedral. Intent now only upon finding Mina and his home, Christian evaded the congestion, slipping through the side streets of which he was familiar.

Suddenly in one of these narrow ways a figure on horseback swung from around a corner, approached and passed him at a terrific pace. The rider was attired in a flowing black cape with a heavy hood. A white encircled swastika was patterned on the breast of the cape.* As he passed Christian the rider ducked his head as though to avoid being seen, but Christian caught one fleeting glimpse of the face. What a face it was!

It was a visage that never would leave Christian's memory. It was blacker than charcoal and the eyes were solid crimson. The mouth, a round puckered hole without lips. The nose, a mere ridge separating the nostrils, like that of a skull.

His breath taken by sheer awe, Christian stopped for a moment. Then, his heart still beating from the encounter, he went on, approaching the square near his home. The macabre bacchanal was there too. But suddenly he stopped as he beheld a familiar figure: *Mina!* He caught his breath, fear and joy contesting in his heart. But no, she was not dancing. He thanked the saints for that. She was merely standing. Someone was talking to her. Christian hurried. He could not run fast enough. She should not be out, he was thinking; not even out of the house at a time like this!

The man talking to Mina was making gestures. Now he was taking her hands. Mina was swaying. Now he held her by the shoulders—was looking forcefully into her eyes.

Christian shouted. Then he recognized the man—to his amazement, Hynek Zerotin. He had both her hands now, and they were swirling. In an instant Christian reached them and with all the power of his arm his fist crashed into Hynek's jaw. The student fell to the ground senseless. Christian seized Mina and half dragged her until she stumbled and then he carried her to her home.

Mina's mother, her face blank, saw them coming. She opened the door and quickly bolted it again after they entered. Christian carried his senseless Mina to a cot and tenderly placed her on it while others of the

* The swastika is an ancient symbol, even as old as the Bronze Age, and has been used in many countries.

family came gaping about. He pressed his lips on hers, and spoke, and finally her blue eyes opened slowly but she didn't reply.

"Why did you let her out?" demanded Christian, arising suddenly.

"She all at once became possessed," said her mother, "and we couldn't control her."

"Give here these pellets. Keep her in bed. I will return within the hour—after I have seen my family. But even then my visit will be brief, for I am with others on a mission to destroy this scourge."

After greeting his family and explaining, Christian returned to Mina.

Restored, she was sitting up, her face, prim and sweet, nestled in a wealth of golden tresses.

"Oh, I am glad to see you, my Christian. They told me you kissed me before. But I didn't know it!"

Christian leaned over. "Then, my love, here is one for you to remember. But now listen, sweetest Mina. My time I count in minutes. With my famous uncle I am en route to seek out and destroy the source of this evil. More on that later. Tell me first and quickly how you knew this Hynek—the man I found seeking liberty with you."

"Pray, believe me, Christian. Until this minute I didn't know his name. I can relate only this much, that a passion to go out into the street seized and overpowered me. Every nerve in me tingled to go out and dance. And yet, I am sure that I was not fully taken by the madness. No, not fuly. The lad you called Hyneck approached me most abruptly. He paid me what I at first took to be a compliment, but a moment later recognized it as an insult. As he took me in his arms I felt a power in his eyes. Then I saw you, and remember little else until I awoke here."

"That is strange—very strange indeed," said Christian. He sat by her pillow and took her slowly in his arms until he held her. "But we shan't let it bother us now," he whispered.

Then he related swiftly the events with which he had been connected, concluding: "But Dr. Planquette knows more than he has told us." He made her promise not to go out of the house again at least until he returned, and with final assurances he departed.

AT THE cathedral Dr. Planquette and Hynek were waiting. An ugly bruise disfigured Hynek's jaw.

"Our comrade became entangled with the dancers," said Dr. Planquette. "But he seems to be all right. I found him unconscious on the street."

"I am sure the mania was not affecting me," said Hynek. "But one of them must have struck me a solid blow."

Sensing that Hynek had not recognized his assailant, Christian effected surprise.

"We must waste no time," said Dr. Planquette, after inquiring of Christian's relatives, "Dresden is a long way."

"But first," said Christian, "let me tell you about the strange figure I saw shortly after we became separated and he described the black-faced horseman. "He was surely a demon—and I would judge one that has something to do with the plague."

Dr. Planquette was excited. "You have seen *Zcerneboh!*" he exclaimed. "Yes, Christian—I saw him too. A frightened creature, is he not? A demon indeed! *More* than that." The old doctor stroked his coarsely matted beard as if contemplating a decision. "Yes, I think I should tell you now of what I saw near Dresden last winter.

"On the wild banks of the Elbe north of the city," he began, "is an ancient grotto. As you know, this city is of Slavic origin. Now there was a tribe of the Wends* called the Obotritians, and they, like the rest of the Wends were in constant battle with the Teutons. These early Wends had a religion of their own, and they worshipped gods that only they knew. One of the Obotritian gods was invested with great evil power. It might be supposed that the gods died with the Obotritians when they were beaten and killed in a great battle with Albert the Bear. But I am not sure. Unknowingly I happened to be near this grotto in my search for certain rare insects valuable to medicine, and which I had learned were to be found in this vicinity.

"Several thick bushes separated me from the unexpected voices that startled me. Peering through the leaves I saw three men emerge from a foliage-hidden gape among

* The Slavs were known to the late Roman geographers as *Venedus*, hence Wends. A fragment of the Wends has survived to the present day in Lusatia, Germany.

the crags. Two of them were ordinary men, so far as I could see, but the third was covered from head to feet in black garments. They addressed this character as Zcerneboh, but the sounds he made in reply were unintelligible—to me, at least.

"One of the men said: 'Zcerneboh. O mighty and ancient one, god and friend of our tribes of old and we their survivors, to you we turn now for revenge against these Teutons who have tried so mercilessly to destroy us. The gods of our brother tribes have failed. But you, Zcerneboh, with your potent evil will curse the Teutons with a plague from which they shall never recover. Go forth again, commit more as you have done, and as before we shall await your return and reward you.'

"Zcerneboh uttered queer sounds in reply, and turned. Then I saw that horrible face which Christian has just described. I went to several of the priests in Dresden, but they were inclined to take little stock of what I told them. They knew vaguely of the grotto, and said they might send someone to investigate but I doubted that they would.

"So it is that grotto outside of Dresden that we must seek to await the return of Zcerneboh, and then, if we can, find some means to destroy him. Now, Hynek, you seemed to have known something about Zcerneboh, too. It is your turn to talk."

"All I can say," said Hynek, "is that some of the young people with whom I used to consort in Dresden have referred at times to Zcerneboh. They had some vague idea of a strange deformed hermit of magical power who lived in a cave somewhere along the wild banks of the Elbe. However, I attached little significance to the story until you mentioned the name at the University."

"Then," said Christian, "let us hurry to this place with all the speed our steeds can spare. And during our rests at night we can discuss means to destroy this Zcerneboh."

THROUGH the plague-ridden country they rode. It was a five-day journey. Some of the communities they passed through seemed to have escaped the mania entirely. Others had been, or still were, in sieges as terrible as at Aix-la-Chapelle. The dancers, losing all control of their movements, continued whirling in wild delirium until they fell in extreme exhaustion, and groaned as in the agonies of death; some dashed out their brains against the walls. Well dancing, they were insensible to external impressions, but were haunted by visions, such as being immersed in a sea of blood or of seeing the heavens open up and the Saviour enthroned with the Virgin Mary. Troops of dancers, inflamed by intoxicating music and followed by crowds who caught the mental infection, went from place to place, taking possession of religious houses and pouring out imprecations against the piests. When they came close under windows householders would throw pails of cold water on them.

It was September 3, 1374, when the trio from Paris reached Dresden, home of the margraves of Meissen. They found it a quaint and lovable city, devoid of the mania (hardly the center it was destined to become in another pair of centuries). After arming themselves with swords they crossed the Augustus Bridge to the northeast side of the Elbe and traveled several miles down the bank until they came to the area Planquette had described.

It was a long search through an extensive thicket before they came upon a trail. They followed it until it descended to the shore of the Elbe. Cleverly concealed among the reeds and watergrowth was a tiny harbor where a group of light skiffs was tied to willows.

"We are on the trail," said Dr. Planquette. "This must be their point of access to the ancient grotto."

"Then," suggested Christian, "we'll retract our steps and follow the path to its other end."

Soon after passing the point where they had found the trail it's course became winding and rugged. It led them between boulders, through dense gullies for several thousand feet.

At last they came to a division and chose the branch to the right. This made a series of left turns and finally completed a loop, returning them to the division.

"I think I understand," said Dr. Planquette, "let us follow this loop around once more." After several paces he stopped. "This spot looks familiar," he said, parting the

bushes on the left side—revealing a yawning split in the rocks.

"The grotto!" exclaimed Dr. Planquette, and the three peered eagerly through the parted foliage.

"Here," said the Doctor, "is the sacred rendezvous of the Wends. Here, I think, we shall find the source of their evil. We must be on our keenest guard. They—not we—must be the surprised ones." He reached into a pouch which he carried under his cloak. Handing Christian and Hynek each a small object, he said: "Fasten this silver cross about your neck. It may serve as a protection."

Christian took his, but Hynek, withdrawing, said, "I am not superstitious, Doctor. I should rather trust my sword, if you don't mind," and he declined the amulet.

"Wiser to trust in both," admonished the leader. "This is no time to show your stubbornness, Hynek, but I will not argue with you. Come! We enter!"

Into the cave they went. The Doctor would have gone first, but Christian seized precedence. The floor dropped away so fast that they were forced to wait until their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. Then they discerned a passage curving downward. The floor was sandy. As they progressed the sides closed completely above them until it became a veritable tunnel. As such it continued for three hundred feet, widening suddenly into a chamber of uncertain dimensions.

"The terminus," said Dr. Planquette.

"But it is light in here," puzzled Hynek.

"There are crevices in the ceiling," said the Doctor. "The light must penetrate indirectly."

They continued their inspection in silence, but at last the Doctor shrugged and said they may as well go back.

"But no, declared Christian. 'I have made a discovery!"

HE WAS pointing toward the ceiling. The others looked closely and saw a small irregular opening ten feet from the floor. With the aid of ledges and projections that seemed to be just in the right places, Christian climbed to it—and through it. In a moment his face reappeared beckoning for them to follow; and in another moment the three were reunited in an inner chamber where a small lamp burned in a corner.

"At last!" whispered Planquette. "But no Wends are here, which is probably lucky for us. It's unfortunate we lost so many of our number. We will go back outdoors to hide in the thicket and await their return. Already I have devised a plan. The first chamber, you noted, had crevices in the ceiling whereby light seeped in. We will seek the outlet on one of those crevices from above, then await the Wends' return. I will obtain some potent liquid from an alchemist in Dresden. When they are in the chamber we'll pour the chemical through the crevice. It will create immediately a venomous gas which will destroy them at once."

Christian and Hynek commended the plan. They climbed back into the first chamber and started up the passage. But as they neared the entrance they heard the sound of men approaching.

"Quick!" said Planquette. "If found here we are lost. Let us dash out and into the bushes before they round the curve and see us."

Action followed. Action in the nick of time, for they had barely gotten out of sight when a party of men rounded the curve. In the lead was the horrible figure called Zcerneboh, followed in single file by seven or eight men. The last one was taller and heavier than the others. Over his shoulder he bore a figure, soon seen to be that of a young woman.

NOW came the unexpected, the treacherous bolt that left Planquette and Christian abashed and defeated before their plans were started. For Hynek suddenly left their sides and strode out to face the Wends. With sheer amazement they heard Hynek cry out in a loud voice:

"Zcerneboh! Loncu buh-nezcen! Zcerneboh! zcyb'n vendilahnzi!"

Holding forth an iron swastika which he had torn out from his undergarments, Hynek dropped to his knees as if in obeisance.

Planquette clutched his nephew's arm. "Hynek is a Wend! He has betrayed us!" he exclaimed with hushed voice. "Come, Christian—into the bushes—escape!"

The Wends, all but Zcerneboh, had stopped on beholding Hynek, though

they registered no alarm. The monster Zcerneboh had continued alone into the grotto. But at this instant Hynek had arisen and was pointing to his erstwhile confederates in the bushes. Now was Planquette's plotting of a moment before, in fact the whole venture, ruined. This was not Christian's concern, however; he had no desire to escape—for he saw that the female captive was the girl he loved.

"Mina!" he cried, dashing impulsively toward the small but stocky man who bore her, and drawing his sword.

Mina's answer was a semi-smile of hopelessness.

These Wends seemed to respect Hynek. They spoke little themselves, but were quick to respond to his words. Christian and Planquette were overpowered easily. When their hands were bound Hynek faced them:

"Yes, my colleagues—my fools! I am a Wend and a proud one. Too proud to have relished such dirt as pretended colleagues! The Wends yet will destroy the Teutons and avenge the atrocities of the past. Charlemagne vainly tried to subdue us, Henry I exacted tribute from us, Otto I divided our country, and Albert the Bear drove, subjugated, and humiliated us.

"But now, my dear old tutor," he continued sarcastically, "perhaps it is well that I joined your class in Paris. Strange that I should have met up with you—you who probably are the only person in all Europe who knows too much about the Wends—and Zcerneboh. Strange fate!"

The anaemic, scowling Hynek now turned to his fellow Wends: "This is the Planquette I warned you of. I trust you received my messages. This fellow and his nephew played into my hands easily after I saw that they meant business. Both will serve as sacrifices. Ah! and my good Enoch—I see that you obtained the comely wench as requested. Zcerneboh will be pleased with her. He likes always the delicate blonde—and so do I! As she was betrothed to this Christian Nohl, who struck me down when I tried to seize her at Aix-la-Chapelle, I shall feel that my score is even with him. Now! how goes the work?"

It was Enoch who replied. He had set Mina on her feet. "It goes well," he said. "But Zcerneboh must not relinquish even slightly. His power has not yet reached the full extent that it must to annihilate the Teutons. We have, however, the complete support and obedience of the Wends throughout the land, wherever they are; and they pray to Zcerneboh faithfully and provide the sacrifices."

"Good," answered Hynek. "Come now, all. We must to Zcerneboh. It is time for the rites."

Down into the grotto they filed, the three captives cautiously guarded. Through to the second chamber they climbed where the lamp burned and swastikas adorned the walls. Zcerneboh was not in sight.

Speaking always in Wendish they squatted along the sides of the chamber, forcing the captives to stand in the middle. Finally Hynek revealed the topic of their talk:

"Dr. Planquette," he said, "you are not one of the hated Teutons. Therefore you will not be satisfactory to Zcerneboh as a sacrifice. Nevertheless, we cannot, with your knowledge of us, permit you to live. I am reluctant of this, for as a scholar you are to be admired. However, Nohl and the wench will give themselves to Zcerneboh."

Hynek now gestured to his stocky, square-jawed lieutenant: "Enoch, take Planquette, and take my sword. Blood such as this must not be spilled in this sacred place. Destroy Planquette outside the grotto, destroy him in the name of Mighty Zcerneboh and his crusade of madness against the Teutons; and return here for the rites. And take care, for though Planquette is an old man, he is strong. We shall prepare for the rites."

Christian and Mina pleaded to the Wends for mercy in behalf of old Planquette, for which they were struck across the mouth and ordered silent. Enoch shoved Planquette brutally through the difficult entrance and clambered after him with zest to fulfill Hynek's order.

TWO men lifted a slab from the floor—secret entrance to the ritual chamber.

Christian held Mina in his arms. "Do not fear," he whispered. "If we must die we will do it together. But there is still a ray of hope. Surely the God of the Christians is stronger than this god of evil."

"I am praying, Christian," she answered. "And that I shall keep on doing until the end."

All the remaining Wends except Hynek had descended steps beneath the slab.

Now, Hynek, a sickening leer on his pallid face, approached Christian and Mina—tore them apart—seized Mina in his arms.

"A pretty snatch of a damsel, Teuton wench that you are!" he said thickly, and digging his finger into her arms he demanded: "A kiss for me!—before you go to Zcerneboh!" But craftily watching Christian from the corners of his eyes, he saw the lover bracing for attack.

With subtle swiftness Hynek lashed out his arm, throwing Christian off balance.

"You did it once before, you filthy Teuton!" rasped Hynek, "but not again!"

Scratching and twisting, Mina released herself.

The Wend, panting and nervous with rage, cackled: "Down to Zcerneboh—both of you," and maniacally he pushed them with his feet into the opening where the slab had been. Down the cold hard steps they rolled, Mina first.

Though bruished badly, Christian got to his feet quickly. Looking for Mina, he saw her yellow tresses in a corner near the foot of the rock-hewn steps—and dimly he saw the outline of her body, her garments torn, her limbs bleeding.

With a madness that made his head whirl he shouted an oath that struck back from the rock walls to split his own ears. He dropped to her side.

The Wends, who were going about lighting their lamps, stopped momentarily at his outburst, then went on, unmoved, with their preparations.

Christian sat against the wall after lifting the girl gently to his side. Though overwhelmed with hopelessness, he looked about at the ceremony chamber and began to take in details. It was by far the largest room of the series—fully fifty feet square. The walls were decorated crudely though symbolically, the swastika again in predominance. Mina had opened her eyes and was taking things in with him.

Now the room was brighter. Simultaneously they looked to the far side. There was the god Zcerneboh. He stood close against the wall upon a stone dais. Christian, however, was puzzled. This was a small god, only four-and-a-half feet high, and as motionless as stone. But the same repugnant countenance—utterly black—red eyes—small round mouth—and skull-like nostrils. In his hands he held a brass receptacle which a Wend was touching with fire. Incense.

Wends were busy lighting lamps and incense burners and the chamber was growing brilliant. All were chanting in a low monotonous unison: *"Lon bub-nezcen—Zcerneboh—Zcyb'n vendi-lahnzi. Lon bu-nezcen —Zcerneboh—zcyb'n vendi-lahnzi."*

For a few moments Christian and Mina were unmolested, for the Wends were very busy. Enoch returned, wiped his bloody sword, and joined the others.

SUDDENLY Hynek and another seized Mina. A second pair seized Christian. Both were bound with long strips of tape from feet to neck, then, amid sudden crescendo in the chanting, were picked up and laid on the dais at the feet of Zcerneboh.

Currents of air coming from somewhere kept the lamps flickering. This caused shadows to dance about Zcerneboh and the illusion of distorted movements in his body until he seemed weirdly to be dancing. And, the crimson of Zcerneboh's eyes became aglow. But Christian, lying at the black god's feet, saw plainly that he was not moving; that he was a very material god carved out of black marble. He too saw a dark vapor issuing from his disgusting mouth.

Dispersed about, the Wends now were swaying rhythmically on their knees. Their chant continued, growing in volume and pitch. One by one they arose and joined the rhythm of contortions. Now their chant was shrill and noisy intensified by the close rock walls. Through their sinister designs and evil worship they were the manikins of dark and primitive powers.

They danced with a fervor, a mania, while a million others throughout Europe stepped to the same measure, unaware that the disease of their minds was engendered from a secret grotto near Dresden.

Now came the rite's climax, the god's moment. He was moving from his erstwhile fixed position, gliding sidewards. The

helpless Christian saw him move, saw the black hand from in back that was pushing the statue aside. Black fingers, seemingly from out of the rock, grasped the panel, slid the whole contraption to the side exposing a wide opening. Now the jetty hand joined by its mate reached out and grabbed the feet of the bound youth—pulled him through the opening; then Mina. It was she who saw the living Zcerneboh first. She fainted.

Then Christian saw the terrorizing features of the man, or creature, he had seen twice before—once in Aix-la-Chapelle and again outside the grotto. It was still cloaked and hooded in black, and its skin was like burnt paper. Zcerneboh now slid the idol which he resembled back in its place, sealing off again the opening into the ritual room where the worshippers still were dancing. A recess in the back of the idol containing glowing embers which provided the reddened eyes and smoke from the mouth.

The inner sanctum of the Black God Zcerneboh, from what the bound and prone Christian could see, was but a cavernous recess in the rock. Light from an ill-burning lamp, and ventilation, were poor. The foul odor from the creature called a god, was moist and warm, like the freshly spilled blood of a beast. Zcerneboh made some sounds, but he didn't speak. He couldn't speak; his mouth had no lips.

Despite the turmoil of his mind, Christian gathered his faculties to address him:

"Zcerneboh, you are a great and powerful god; I, a weak and humble mortal. I beseech only that you free this damsel. For that I will serve you in any way—bargain my soul, if I must. Will Zcerneboh hear?"

The god did not answer; only looked at him with his crimson globs and made a disgusting sucking noise through the hole that formed his mouth. His face was like a charred and withered mask.

Suddenly Zcerneboh emitted a muffled welp, threw back his hood revealing the whole of his ugly skull. He tore open the top of his cloak, letting it fall to the waist. His ribbed and inky torso swelled as he inhaled. Then he turned toward Mina. Dropped to his knees. He grabbed the unconscious girl in his arms and held her for a moment as though contemplating her throat. The agonized Christian sensed in a flash what this god was—basically a *vampire*. The sacrifices to Zcerneboh were for him to vampirize; the hideous mouth was to suck blood from the throats of humans!

Holding Mina, Zcerneboh was trembling as though in profound ecstasy. Then with a madlike impulse he buried his face in the girl's throat. Christian, straining at his bindings, felt himself on the brink of madness.

As though dulled by a stupor, Zcerneboh stopped. But it was not a stupor. No one had ever dared move the statue of Zcerneboh but himself. However, the rear of the idol had been moved—and someone was entering. Zcerneboh was abashed and enraged. Never before had any one other than the god entered the inner sanctum of his own volition.

It was Enoch.

WITH a terrible sound, Zcerneboh rose —fumbled under his garment for his sword—and drew it. But Enoch was the quicker. His sword already unsheathed, he lunged forward and drove it through the chest of the awed god, who trembled and fell. Enoch stared for a moment at his deed, then cast off his hood. Christian shouted with joy—for there stood Dr. Planquette! In a moment he had Christian and Mina unbound. The girl was coming to.

"This Enoch was too slow," said the doctor. "He lies dead outside the grotto. What happened else you'll soon see."

Carrying Mina, they returned to the ritual chamber. To Christian's amazement all the Wends were lying flat on their stomachs—all except one who was struggling in his bindings. Hynek Zerotin.

"You see," said the doctor, "when I returned disguised in Enoch's robes, I kept in the shadows and no one discovered me. When they started their ritual I imitated them, still keeping in the back. Then when I saw you and Mina drawn behind the idol, I knew the time for action had come. But these Wends by then were in such a state of ecstasy that they never noticed me. I stabbed them, one by one, from the rear. It was like cutting the strings of puppets—they fell that neatly. When there were but two or three still standing, these became conscious that something was wrong. It

was funny to see them try to gather their faculties; but were not quick enough for old Planquette. One of these last was our famous friend Hynek. Well, I decided not to kill him—not for any love of him, of course. So I gently butted his skull with the handle of my sword, then bound him, I fear perhaps not too well for I was in haste to find you and Mina."

"Not a moment, thankfully, too soon to save our lives," said Christian.

Mina was rising and Christian embraced her.

"But where is the frightful Zcerneboh?" asked the girl.

"It will be a pleasure to reply," said Planquette with calm humor. "I believe I can claim the unique distinction of having just murdered a god."

A voice came from behind them. It was the still struggling Hynek. "No mortal can kill a god," he sneered.

"Then perhaps you would like to join us, to see if he is really dead," replied the doctor. They bound Hynek's hands securely behind him, released the other bonds so he could walk, and escorted him to the inner sanctum.

There the body of Zcerneboh, unmistakably dead, lay with his blood still oozing.

ONE look and Hynek swung his head away, paling to whiteness. His voice trembled as he said: "But the Wends yet are strong. There are still other Wend gods eager and ready to avenge our people."

"Then you will admit that Zcerneboh is dead?" asked Planquette.

Hynek was stolid, stunned. Finally he answered: "Zcerneboh is *not* dead. *There* is the real Zcerneboh!" He pointed to the back of the statue. "There reposes the spirit of Zcerneboh—as he has for ages past, immortal, indomitable!"

"I do not believe in your heathen worship," said Planquette. "Howbeit, should there be any truth to what you say, it will be a simple matter for us to destroy that antique carving."

"That would doom you forever!" hissed Hynek.

"Never!" returned Planquette. "But I have another question, in case you are inclined to answer. This Zcerneboh whom I have just stabbed, *who* and *what* is he?"

Hynek deliberated. "For an answer to that I will bargain with you," he replied cautiously.

"How?"

"I'll give you the information in return for your solemn pledge not to destroy the statue."

"Since I do not believe in him anyhow, good enough. You have my pledge."

"And yours, Christian?"

"My pledge not to destroy the statue," said Christian.

"Not to destroy it, nor remove it, nor mar it in the least? Both of you?" persisted the Wend.

They assented.

"Very well, it is this. Zcerneboh, for all his black power, has served the Slavs from the dimmest ages of the past. His idol has been preserved faithfully and worshiped devoutly for countless generations. Even in this very grotto has he been guarded for several centuries. But the spirit of Zcerneboh, unlike that of our other gods, prefers to exist in the body of a living person. That is, if you would consider a vampire* a living person in the exact sense. It has been the tradition for as long as any Wend can remember for a vampire to volunteer for the role, for contrary to belief, no vampire is immortal. How his skin is blackened, his eyes reddened, his features altered to resemble the black marble statue, that is a secret kept between our priests and Zcerneboh. Now, you see, a new vampire will volunteer and the spirit of Zcerneboh will emerge from the statue to live again in him. That is the sum and substance of the matter, and answers your question."

"In that case," said Planquette, "I have made a poor bargain. "It would have been better to destroy the statue and remained in ignorance."

"Perhaps for you," said Hynek, "but I took your pledge on your honor."

"What counts my honor against the lives and happiness of millions? But, no! I still do not believe that gods can live in stone. Your pledge is safe."

Suddenly Hynek seemed inspired The muscles of his face worked, his fists

* It is pertinent that the vampire originally was a creation of Slavic folklore, thus fits appropriately in this tale.

though tied behind him clenched, and his eyes glowed. "There are still other gods of the Wends! There are our military gods, eager to avenge the Wends. You stupid Teutons do not know enough to be beaten! If Zcerneboh has failed, there are the others—Baba Yaga, the female hagfiend; Gore, the god of woe and destruction; Koshchei, of the Deathless Snake; Lyeshy, the Malicious who haunts the forests; Great Perun; Mora; Sventovit, the four-headed, Sky-god of the Elbe, and Triglav, the three-headed ruler of the Three Realms.

"You Teutons," he raved on, "know not what potent powers you provoke when you cross the Wends. Our gods of war are waiting—waiting, and their patience wears. They are waiting to fill you with such craving for war and bloodshed that finally other nations shall arise mighty and with vengeance to destroy you. And then you . . ."

Hynek did not finish. A sound came from the rear of the recess, where the corpse of the Vampire Zcerneboh lay still bleeding. "Wugh-g-h-gh-gh!" and a scraping sound against the stone. With horror, they saw Zcerneboh arising—staggering to feet—lunging toward them.

"He isn't dead!" screamed Mina.

Hynek voiced an exultant cry.

"He has his sword!" cried Christian, gathering Mina into his arms. Realizing they lacked the vital moment to gird for defense, and uncertain as to Zcerneboh's strength they retreated out to the ritual chamber.

Here, if necessary, they would have room to battle. Hynek followed. Stumbling over the Wend corpses they turned in time to face the monstrous deity as he staggered through the opening.

Christian directed Mina up the steps to the chamber above, and returned quickly to Planquette's side to defend themselves and see if possible to the final ending of the vampirish god. Hynek might have capitalized on the opportunity were not his hands still bound.

Zcerneboh straightened. His ghastly head and naked bleeding torso caused even Hynek to shudder. The crimson eyes swept the room, taking in the array of Wendish corpses. But when he moved instead approaching Christian and Planquette, Zcerneboh went toward an opposite wall. He picked up a five-foot log, one of several used by the Wends to sit on. He thrust it over his shoulder and turned around.

"He will try to kill us," warned Planquette. "A move from you, Hynek, and you are dead. Draw your sword, Christian, we must beat him to the attack—I from in back—you from the front for you are more agile!"

Zcerneboh, however, was not coming toward them, but was staggering toward the idol.

The trio stood with amazement to behold an unexpected spectacle, for with a mighty heave Zcerneboh swung the log against the sacred statue. It tottered—crashed with an awesome noise and the chips skidded across the floor in all directions.

With a terrified yell, Hynek Zerotin fell to his knees and dropped his head. Zcerneboh dropped the log, surveyed the fragments, and slumped to the floor. The grotto, all the rocks around them, seemed to tremble, and for a prolonged moment weird cries came out from the walls. For awhile Christian and Planquette were as if transfixed. Then Planquette went to Zcerneboh and stooping, examined him.

"Now," he pronounced, "Zcerneboh is really dead."

* * * * *

ONCE again the horizontal rays of the sun were striking the cupola of the Octagonal Chapel at Aix-la-Chapelle, and once again Christian Nohl was standing beneath the Barbarossa chandelier. Though not many months had passed, he was a much older looking Christian. This time, however, he stood alone.

But it was not long before someone else entered the chapel, the figure of an old man. It was, in fact, old Henri Planquette.

"So sober at a time like this, my nephew?" he questioned cheerily as he came to Christian's side.

"Ah, my good uncle, but Charlemagne was truly a great man."

"Indeed. But listen to me. I have most conclusive news. Reports have just come in from five other cities confirming unanimously that the Dancing Mania ceased all at once on the night of September 3."

Christian looked up with keen interest. "Wonderful!" he exclaimed, and grasped the old man's hand.

A door to the chapel from another part of the cathedral opened, and they were interrupted as a woman's voice called out: "Christian, why didn't you tell us the Doctor had come? The Father and all of us are waiting!"

"I am sorry, Frau . . ."

"Now! now! No more 'Frau.' From now on it's 'Mamma' to me. But wait until you see Mina! Her gown, if I did make it myself, is beautiful—gorgeous! And Mina, if she is my own daughter, is the loveliest bride ever to take nuptial vows at Aix-la-Chapelle!"

But suddenly she hushed, and they entered, for music from the Charlemagne organ was rising

Midnight Moon

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

THIS ghostly rider of the sky that spills
Palid quicksilver over field and shore,
May be herself the home of ghosts that pour
Over her torn plateaux and pockmarked hills.
Here, we may think, the lover's shade fulfills
Its tryst with some dear phantom lost before;
And throneless kings, and warriors slain, may soar
Where the faint moonlight seeps in spectral rills.

And this perhaps is why when, cold and clear,
Slow radiance floats across a midnight wall,
We seem to feel a Presence standing near,
A formless Something where the shadows fall;
And sadness moves us, and an eerie fear
While the low winds, like astral voices, call.

The Fangs of Tsan-Lo

OF COURSE I do not know about the unknown. But I am sure that there is more to this world than any living man has even dreamed. Silly? Talking through my hat? Perhaps, but my first fear of Tsan-Lo came to me the day I read the letter about him. And yet it was just an ordinary letter, like hundreds I've received.

Dear Mr. Roberts:

As per our previous agreement, I am this day shipping Tsan-Lo from Wind City. He should arrive the 27th of May.

By JIM KJELGAARD

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

What possible connection could there be between a prehistoric lizard and a Chesapeake dog?

I am depending on you to see that he receives proper care.

To be perfectly frank, I do not expect miracles from him. He is big, strong, and able, but obstinate, and possibly you will have to undo the harm wrought by my amateurish efforts. I have experimented with Tsan-Lo myself.

Please keep me informed of his progress.

Sincerely,
Dr. Ibellius Grut.

I stared across the desk. But sweat stood on my forehead and cold chills chased each other up and down my spine. I tried to shake the feeling off, and could not, and I read the letter again. There was nothing even a little bit strange about it, unless you'd call Tsan-Lo a strange name for a Chesapeake retriever and wonder a little bit about anyone named Dr. Ibellius Grut. I tried to shrug it away.

"Get hold of yourself, Clint," I said. "First thing you know you'll be crazy as a drunken pigeon."

"Drunken pigeons don't talk to themselves," a voice said.

I turned around and saw Sally standing in the open door. She's Sally Evers, daughter of John Evers, and I wouldn't do a darned thing for her—except anything she asked me to. Yes, I'm in love with her. In fact, to put it mildly, she's the sun, the moon, the stars, and the air I breathe all rolled into one. But I'd never told her about it because, though you wouldn't call them exactly filthy rich, her folks have plenty of what it takes. And her mother made up Sally's mind that she's going to marry Harris H. Harris, who's social register, Harvard, and the Harris Company. Nobody knows why she wants to spend any of her time with an ordinary trainer of retrievers—but I'm awfully grateful for small favors as long as she's part of them.

"'Smatter, Frank Buck?" she asked me. "You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

"Only a vision, sweetheart," I told her. "Come on in."

That was spoken very lightly, but boy how it felt deep down inside! Sally's about five feet three, and beautiful from any angle. Her coppery hair frames a small face, and I think it's her eyes that get me most. They're big and brown, and half the time they're full of the devil. But the other half they're so serious that Sally could be a thousand years old. She has the darndest ideas, especially about animals and animal training, and she spouts them out on the slightest provocation.

"What'd you have for breakfast?" she wanted to know.

"A little girl about your size. Too bad you weren't around. I could have eaten another one."

"Clint Roberts, the great humorist!" she said scathingly. "But you do look terrible, and no wonder. Look at this house! The only things in place are the pictures of your dogs! I declare! Men would still be savages if women hadn't been around to civilize 'em!"

"Yes," I said drily, "the earth would probably be overrun with uncivilized men if there'd never been any women." But the little cold fingers were still plucking at my spine, and I didn't want her to notice it. I, a professional trainer of retrievers, was frightened because I had another one to train! "Why don't you come around once in a while? Buck's been lying on the ground with his head between his paws, moaning to himself since you left yesterday afternoon. And, if it's any satisfaction to you, he refused his dinner last night."

"Oh, poor Buck!"

She's like that, loves to pretend that she's tougher than a baby-killer most of the time. But the minute anything suffers, or she thinks it's suffering, she melts all over the place. She scooted out the back door, threaded her way among dog crates, and stopped in front of Buck's run. He had been lying under his kennel on the ground. But the minute she came in sight he jumped out, started leaping in the air and yelling his fool head off. I stayed on the porch a minute to enjoy the sight.

I HAVE thirty-seven dogs. Five belong to me, and Buck's one of them. He's a big, black Labrador with a sleek, shiny coat, and muscled like a lion, and is the best retriever I ever saw. I'm grooming him for the National field trials, and will win them as soon as I can correct a few minor faults. He, too, adores Sally, and when I got to the run he was pushing his nose through the wire so she could scratch it. Sally looked at me.

"Clint Roberts!" she scolded. "Let this poor dog out of that dinky little pen!"

It isn't a dinky little pen, it's twenty by twenty, but I let Buck out and made him sit. He obeyed, looking at Sally instead of me. It's she he loves best, and I guess he'd do anything in the world for her. Sally picked up a stick and threw it.

"Fetch!" she said.

Buck unleashed all the power in his mighty body, and flew after the stick as though he'd been shot from a gun. At the edge of the mud hole he paused, leaped a quarter of the way across it, struggled through the mucky slime, climbed out on the other side, and got the stick. He jumped right back into the mud, crossed it, and put the stick in Sally's hand. His coat wasn't black any more, but mud-colored.

"Fine thing," I said, "making my dog swim across the mud!"

She tickled Buck's ears. "Oh, Buck can take it. Why don't you fill that awful place in, anyway?"

"I've dumped two hundred tons of ashes and gravel into it."

The mud hole was on the place when I got it. It's a pit, I think an old quarry hole, and I don't know how deep it is because I've never been able to sound the bottom. It's fed by subterranean springs that carry a lot of gooey mud from somewhere. On top it's soupy stuff, but the mud gets thicker the farther down you go. About all a man can do is push a fifteen-foot pole down into it—any deeper than that the mud's so thick you can't push.

We wandered down to the lake, and I watched Sally put Buck through his paces. He jumped in, and swimming so smoothly that scarcely a ripple flowed behind him, brought back a stick she cast. Then she pointed a floating stick out to him and he got that. He seemed eager to obey her, and if only he'd work that way for me I'd as soon enter him against any competition anywhere. I looked at my watch.

"Well, I'm glad somebody can play. But I'm a working man. I have to pick up a new dog."

"Can we take Buck?"

"Nope."

"Gee, you're mean."

But it's one of my rules that a new dog must come in as easily as possible. They're usually nervous anyway, after a long train ride and new surroundings, and taking another dog when I pick them up at the station only makes them more so. But I knew Sally couldn't resist having a look at a new dog any more than she can stop breathing. We locked Buck back in his run, and left him moaning while we climbed into the pickup.

"What is the new dog?" Sally asked.

"A Chesapeake. His name's Tsan-Lo."

Sally settled back in the seat and away we went.

THE train was just pulling out when we got to the station. We walked around to the express platform, and sure enough, there was my dog in his crate. I whistled. Whoever crated the dog either had a lot of money to waste or else wanted to be absolutely sure that Tsan-Lo didn't get out. He was in a tubular steel crate, reinforced at the corners with steel blocks, and the door had a double padlock on it. Dimly through the slats I made out the dog, lying down, and there was a big white sign riveted to the crate. "For Mr. Clinton Roberts. From Dr. Ibellius Grut."

And again, for some unknown reason, the hair at the nape of my neck bristled and cold chills ran up my spine. Even as he stood crated on the station platform, there was something about Tsan-Lo like nothing in any dog I'd ever seen. It wasn't what he did, for he did nothing except lie in the straw on the floor of his crate. But what came out of that crate—. I couldn't see it but I could feel it. It was as though this dog was directing at everything else some invisible aura, some mysterious waves. And it was at that moment, for the first time in my life, that I felt hate.

I do not mean that I hated. But I sensed that the air was charged with hate, viciousness, brutality, and concentrated fury in its most primitive and elemental form. It was emanating from the crate that housed Tsan-Lo. I shook my head, trying to shake such notions from it. Sober thought told me that the whole thing was silly, no dog was capable of the attributes with which I was crediting this one. But I could not shake it off, and unaccountably there rose before me a mental image of a *papier mache* creature I had seen in a museum. Tyrannosaurus, they had called it, a reconstruction of a monstrous prehis-

toric reptile with huge jaws and immense teeth. As I stood before it my imagination had given it life, and I clearly remembered experiencing the same sensations I felt now.

But it was still silly. What possible connection could there be between a prehistoric lizard and a Chesapeake dog? The one had become extinct long before man ever trod the earth, the other was a product of man. I had never seen the dog I could not handle, and I'd handle this one. I took a step forward, and was halted by the pressure of Sally's hand on my arm.

"Clint, don't!"

I looked down at her. Her eyes were wide, and the little pulse in her temple throbbed furiously. I shivered. Sally is soft as a marshmallow when anything's hurt or needs her help. But I had never known her to shrink from a problem or lack some way of solving it. She's no coward, but her staring eyes and taut mouth revealed that now she was very much afraid.

"Don't accept that dog!" she whispered. "Send it right back!"

"Nonsense!" I forced a laugh.

"It—. It's not a dog, it's a monster!" she breathed. "It hates me, and would like to kill me! Can't you feel it?"

Again the cold shivers ran up and down my spine and my lips were suddenly dry. So she felt it too, and perhaps more strongly than I since the dog's hate emanations seemed to be directed at her. But I still told myself that it was nonsense. Tsan-Lo might be a vicious dog, with a certain something about him that made his viciousness felt. He could be nothing else and I had handled vicious dogs before. Sometimes, if they're carefully trained and watched, they make the best hunters.

"What have you been eating?" I joked.

"Clint!" her fingers dug into my arms. "Do you know Ibellius Grut?"

"Why—. He's a doctor."

"He's more than that, Clint! He's been in two insane asylums, and denounced by the Humane Society a dozen times for his cruel experiments on animals. He's been experimenting on Tsan-Lo. You'll be sorry if you take him!"

"But I can't refuse him. I make my living training dogs. The least I can do is accept this one, and tell Dr. Grut whether or not he's any good. After all, he's paying me fifty dollars a month to find that out."

She shook her head, "You're going to take him?"

"I must, Sally."

"Put him in a good strong run."

"Never fear. He won't get away from me."

I walked over to the crate and looked down at Tsan-Lo. He was a big yellow brute with a massive, strong-jawed head and bigger then a Chesapeake ordinarily is. In fact, he was so big that he looked even a little malformed. His eyes were wide and yellow, and when he swung his head to look at me I had to look away. For a moment I was a little bit nauseated, and again I thought back to the *papier mache* tyrranosaurus. But aside from looking at me there was no response whatever from Tsan-Lo, no wag of the tail, no whine, none of the eager little manifestations with which crated dogs usually greet anyone who comes near them. I said:

"Hi, San!"

But still there was no response. The dog swung his great head to focus his baliskisk eyes on Sally, and for one split second I was almost tempted to take her advice and return him to Grut. If only I had—.

But I didn't. I backed the pick-up to the crate, swung it on, and put the tail-board up.

SALLY was silent beside me as we drove home. It was not the silence she had affected on the way to the station, when she hadn't wanted to talk because talking would have spoiled the symphony of a spring morning. Now she was moody, thoughtful, and I could tell by her eyes that she was still afraid. And I could still feel the weird aura Tsan-Lo cast. But the first cold impact of that had worn off, and I was more than ever convinced that here was only an unusual dog which, no doubt, would have to be approached and trained by unusual methods. I drove the pick-up into the yard and backed up to a run. Sally got out beside me, speculative, but said suddenly:

"Look at Buck!"

I looked. Buck was standing in front of his kennel, feet braced and head down. His ruff was bristled, his lip curled back over white fangs. The dogs nearest Tsan-Lo were walking stiff-leggedly about.

"Clint, you still have time to take that dog out of here," Sally said, forcefully.

"Uh!" I scoffed. "It's only a dog."

Just the same I opened the run, lifted the crate down, sat it inside the gate, took the two keys that were wired to the padlocks, unlocked the door, and opened the crate. Tsan-Lo walked out, and without exposing myself at all to him I withdrew the crate to close the run. Buck went crazy, leaping against the wire and snarling. He began to bark, and his eyes rolled whitely as foam dipped from his jaws. I called:

"Buck, sit!"

He continued to rage and claw at the wire, so overcome by fury—or fear?—that at first he did not hear me. A couple of the other dogs tuned in with him, and a little Golden retriever slunk fearfully into her kennel. I called, more imperatively:

"Buck, sit!"

He sat. But his head was still hunched between his shoulders and his lips drawn back in a snarl. I turned to look at Tsan-Lo. He betrayed no interest whatever in his new surroundings, merely walked to the center of the run, sat down, and turned his opaque eyes on Sally. She shrank from them, and put both hands to her mouth.

"Clint, I can't stand that dog! He'll kill me if he gets the chance!"

"Don't worry. He won't get the chance."

I was scarcely conscious that my own voice trembled as I spoke, and at that second I wished mightily that I had taken her advice and returned Tsan-Lo to Dr. Ibellius Grut. Sally had called him a monster, and she had not miscalled him. She walked down to Buck's run, and the big Labrador sidled over to be near her. But he did not beg for her caresses or leap against the wire. He merely sat, as though he was protecting her, and continued to watch Tsan-Lo.

"I must be going," Sally said.

"Okeh. Come back day after tomorrow and I'll show you a dog that's learned something."

"Ugh! I hope so. Be careful when you go into the run with that thing."

"Don't worry."

I WAS glad when she'd gone. Not because I didn't want her around—my wildest and fondest dream was that some day I'd have her around all the time—but because there did seem to be something that menaced her in that big Chesapeake. After she'd gone, Tsan-Lo stretched out with his head on his paws. But he didn't sleep. His colorless eyes remained wide open. And he did not even lie, or move, like another dog. There was something about him very cold, and very far removed from anything I had ever seen or sense. He seemed an atavistic thing, and again I thought of the museum's dinosaur.

But it was still only another dog, I assured myself stubbornly as I went into the house, and if I couldn't handle him I'd have no business calling myself a dog trainer. Of course I couldn't guarantee to make a hunter out of him, some dogs are no more capable of discharging the duties for which they've been created than are some men. But if I failed I could always send him back to Ibellius Grut. I mixed the daily feed, and the first thing I noticed when I pushed the feed cart outside was Buck. He hadn't moved from the edge of his run, was still sitting with his eyes glued on Tsan-Lo. I made a mental note never to let them get together, one or the other would be killed if I did. But when I gave Tsan-Lo his allotted feed, again I turned away from his fathomless eyes. There was something about his stare that I just couldn't stand.

That night Sally's roadster stopped in front of the house. She'd changed her slacks and denim shirt for a white blouse and a blue skirt, and my heart came into my throat. She looked—. Imagine how an angel looks and you'll have it.

"How's it going?" she asked.

"Good. It always goes good."

"That—. That Tsan-Lo too?"

"Oh him," I laughed, and lied. "I went in his run this afternoon and pulled his ears. The only thing the matter with him is laziness."

She looked sharply at me, "Well, I could be wrong. Just the same here's a book I want you to read."

I tucked the book under my arm, it would be a desecration to look at anything else when Sally's around.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Oh, Harris is coming in and I must pick him up at the station."

"Well—that's fine."

"I'll be seeing you."

She drove off, and I stood for a moment wishing I'd inherited a million or so from my father instead of having been brought up in an orphanage. Then maybe Sally Evers would have been wearing my ring instead of Harris H. Harris's. But some things you just can't change, and this was one of them. I looked idly at the book she'd given me.

It was *The Perfect World,* by Dr. Ibellius Grut, and because I hadn't anything else to do I sat down to read it.

IT WAS a strange-looking book—old, tattered, and musty. It was dedicated to "The Quest for Perfection," was privately printed by Dr. Grut, and began:

"Since time began the world in which we live has never been either perfectly balanced or perfectly adjusted. The history of that world is the history of seeking such balance and adjustment. It has not been achieved in man and man's possessions. They are but a passing phase of an infinitely greater plan, the ultimate aim of which is absolute perfection."

There followed a discussion of the earth's creation, and the little, mouse-like creature which was the first mammal to come out of the steaming seas to run about on the land. There were a whole lot of formulas and equations that I had never seen before, and which I judged to be original with Dr. Grut. Then:

"There can be no doubt that a fumbling and far from perfect intelligence has thus far dictated everything which has occurred. It is a striving, restless brain that does not know how to proceed but must work on the trial and error method. It eradicates its own mistakes, and thus we see the passing of the giant reptiles. But sometimes it approaches that which it desires, and for an example of this we have only to consider the dog.

"Ample evidence points to the fact that the dog, as we know it today, is the descendant of some giant creatures which, except for its size, was very much like our present-day house pets and hunting companions. The size of these ancient dogs surpasses human imagination. How long they roved the earth no man knows. But the restless brain which created them perceived at last that, as they were, they did not fit into the general scheme and eradicated them—or rather—let them eradicate themselves.

"That was accomplished by a simple, natural process. In the first place, the appetites of things so huge must have been enormous. There was just not enough food for them. Then, too, there was nothing save hunger to challenge them or keep them alert, and as a consequence their brains deteriorated to the point where they could no longer adapt themselves to changing conditions. Such a dog, accustomed to living within a certain area, would not possess even the intelligence to forage into another district when its food supply ran out. Thus it died of starvation, and thus the other great dogs died.

"Though this applied generally, it did not apply completely. Some dogs, doubtless the smaller and more adaptable, survived. They, and their descendants, had to compete for the available food with predators more nearly their own size. Thus their brains were sharpened and their adaptability developed. Gradually the dog as we know it today has evolved. True, man has taken that dog and by selective breeding has produced half a hundred forms and sizes which never would have been present had their development been unimpeded and uninterrupted. But there is within every dog an immutable something which man can never change! The smallest and most effete poodle bears within itself the same germ that its giant ancestor bore.

"Do not think that the great dogs were merely a passing phase, or that the creatures which once inhabited the earth are forever gone! The intelligence that created them can at any time bring them back. It would merely be, as I have proven to my own satisfaction, a matter of applying certain hormosones and hormosone products. Tsan-Lo, the Chinese scientist, originated such applications.

"We can go backward as far as we care to go. Now, can we discover the secret of going forward? Can we—."

THE book went on to discuss other animals and to say that this vast intelligence, this thing that ruled the earth and perhaps the universe, was capable of adapting itself to various forms and some day might even appear as a human being. You couldn't help getting the impression, in the closing paragraphs, that that man had already been born in the person of one Ibellius Grut.

Whew! No wonder they'd had him in two insane asylums! The miracle was that they'd ever let him out of either. But he was in Wind City and I was here, and if he suddenly took it in his head to alter the universe he'd probably start on subjects within reach. Besides it was not up to me to question a man's sanity or his morals, but to train his dog.

The next morning I went out to work Tsan-Lo. Nothing, as far as I could see, had changed. Tsan-Lo, his steady yellow eyes unblinking, lay on the ground. Buck watched him, maintaining a steady vigil where the big Chesapeake was at no time out of his sight. Except that they were a little quieter than usual, the other dogs were normal. With the training collar in my hand, I stood for a moment before the door of Tsan-Lo's run.

And then I left it, ran away with the collar in my hand to some place where I could no longer see that yellow sphinx. I told myself that it was too early to begin, the dog should have time to adjust itself to its new home. But I knew the real reason. I was afraid, very much afraid. There was something about that immovable hellion to inspire fear.

It was early evening before I screwed my courage up to the point where I could return. And, in addition to the training collar, I carried a baseball bat. I knew that I had to go in that cage, or I would never again dare call myself a dog trainer. But I was going to be prepared which I did. I opened the door and stepped in.

Without seeming to move at all Tsan-Lo hurled himself up and out in a springing, savage leap straight at my throat. But luck was on my side. The swung bat collided soddenly with the side of his head and he dropped to lie twitching on the ground. I left him there and walked away.

I WAS awakened the next morning by an eerie sense of something unreal and terrible. I fought to adjust myself, and rose on the bed to peer out. I could see nothing except a yellow mass of something plastered against the window, and I fell back on the bed. Strangely, at the same time, I had a curious sensation of being both awake and in full possession of my senses, and in the grip of some awful nightmare. I was vaguely aware of a noise outside, and finally identified it positively as Buck's raging voice. There was a heavy, nauseous scent in my nostrils, but finally I shook myself awake and leaped out of bed. Just at that moment the window shattered and the terrible, complete reality of what was outside burst upon me with all the sharpness of a stinging whip lash.

I tried to run, to escape from the bedroom into the kitchen and get my hands on the revolver I kept there. But the great jaws that were thrust through the open window opened and closed on my pajamas. I was dragged back through the window and dropped to the grass beneath it. I lay motionless there, unable to cry out, or move, or do anything except stare.

Tsan-Lo stood over me, and even my most horrible nightmares had never painted a picture so terrible. As he squatted there, the top of his head touched the top of the second-story window. His yellow, expressionless eyes were big as saucers. He panted slightly, and the fangs over which his lips were curled were a full six inches long. His paws were the size of elephant's feet, and still all I could do was lie and stare. It had happened, as Ibellius Grut's book had said it could! Something—! Somehow—!

My shocked brain began to function, and for some reason I remembered an excerpt from Grut's letter, "I have experimented on Tsan-Lo myself." He had! Indeed he had! And the tap on the head I had given Tsan-Lo last night had set in active motion all the hellish things with which Grut had been working. Tsan-Lo, with the brain of a killer, was bigger than the biggest Percheron stallion! Desperately I gauged my chances of doing anything at all. And then the dog moved.

He reached down to rip my pajama coat from me, and a scrape of his immense paw carried away the trousers. I lay stark naked, and he dipped his head to gather me in his jaws. I felt his hot tongue on my belly, the roof of his mouth gritted on my back. I was to Tsan-Lo what a rabbit is to an ordinary Springer or Labrador. Had he so desired he might have bitten me in half and swallowed me in six gulps.

But he didn't. He hardly more than pinched, and it was not difficult to understand the reason for that. He was a retriever,

undoubtedly one which had had some training, and they are taught to be tender-mouthed. Even though this one had reverted four hundred thousand years, he still was unable to forget the training that had been drummed into his brain.

With my head, shoulders, and arms dangling from one side of his jaws, and my thighs and legs from the other, Tsan-Lo began to trot away. I was half numb with terror, but still noticed hazily what went on about me. There was Buck, leaping against his run and trying to tear it down as he strove to close with this monstrous thing. A half dozen of the other dogs, the braver ones, were likewise snarling and barking. But most of them cowered in their kennels. I saw Tsan-Lo's shattered run.

Paying not the least attention to the other dogs, Tsan-Lo threaded his way among the kennels and started for the lake. Still only half-conscious, but thinking with the detached clarity that a numbed man sometimes will achieve, I tried to fathom his design. Tsan-Lo entered the lake, waded out far beyond the depth where an ordinary dog would have been swimming, and struck across the deep water. It was then that I knew his intent. There was a woods on the other side of the lake. Tsan-Lo was a wild thing, and like all such he wanted to eat his captured prey in solitude. We were three-quarters of the way across the lake when he suddenly opened his jaws to drop me. I heard a high-pitched, excited voice:

"Buck, fetch!"

I SWAM groggily, trying to keep my head above water, and turned to gaze at the shore. My blood froze in my veins. Standing on the shore, trim and slender and unafraid, was Sally. Tsan-Lo swam toward her with his head high, churning the water and leaving a curling wake behind. I screamed:

"Sally, run! For God's sake, run!"

Buck's silky black coat shone like a polished mirror as he sprang into the lake. I saw Tsan-Lo gain the bank, bear down on Sally. I tried, with all the strength I had left, to swim toward them, to reach her side before that horror did. But even as I swam I knew that it was hopeless. And something seemed to have hold of me now, something that gripped my limbs and dragged me back into the water. The bright morning faded into night.

. . . When I awakened I was lying on the lake shore, with my head pillowed on Sally's lap. I looked up into her eyes, and saw tears there.

"Clint! Darling!" she moaned.

I moved then. I think that word from Sally would have brought me back from the dead.

"I—. What happened?"

"Clint!" she kissed me then. "You're alive!"

"What'd you call me?"

"Darling," her eyes were shining.

"What about Harris H. Harris?"

"He told me last night that he's going to marry Lucy Stanner, of the banking Stanners. But I like dogs—and dog trainers."

"Tsan-Lo?"

"He fell in the mudhole, Clint. I ran down this morning when I heard Buck raising the fuss. I saw that Tsan-Lo had broken out of his pen, and that you'd broken your bedroom window when, in the grip of a nightmare, you left your bed. I sent Buck to bring you out of the lake. Tsan-Lo attacked me. But I was on the other side of the mudhole, and he tried to cross it. But he went down."

"He—. He was big as a horse," I murmured.

"Clint, darling, you're still dreaming. I always knew you needed a woman to take care of you."

"I—. I need some clothes," I said.

Sally smiled. "The care's already started, Clint. I got some trousers from the house and put them on you."

That's about all, except that when I wrote to tell Dr. Ibellius Grut of Tsan-Lo's death I received word that Grut had been found dead in his office. That was three years ago, and Sally's Mrs. Roberts now. We live here, and train retrievers, and we're doing all right too. Little Sally—she's the image of her mother and I hardly know which one to love the most.

Of course there is one other item worth mentioning, and you have to remember that there was never yet a situation with which Sally was unable to cope. For instance, if she could possibly arrange it, her husband would look back on some things as just a

terrible fantasy, and never as reality. After all, I have to work with dogs. But I finally had the mudhole drained. They took a skeleton out of there, a skeleton of a huge dog that scientists said was at least a quarter of a million years old. It made quite a stir in the papers. Then, too, I'd always been of the opinion that any ordinary dog could easily have crossed that mudhole. But if something weighing three thousand pounds ever fell into it—. I didn't say anything.

There are times when it's just as well not to.

THE SHAPE OF THRILLS TO COME

A New Jules de Grandin . . .

"KURBAN"

by SEABURY QUINN

. . . . shadow-shapes in the Dream of the Infinite

Also—

Robert Bloch

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and others of your favorite fantasy authors

JANUARY **WEIRD TALES** *OUT NOVEMBER FIRST*

Soul Proprietor

By ROBERT BLOCH

"FOR SALE—One human soul, in reasonable condition, to highest bidder. Owner must dispose of same at once. What am I offered?—BOX 418."

PETE RYAN read the damp proof-sheet of the advertisement and whistled.

"You aren't going to run this ad in our

If somebody wants to sell his soul why shouldn't he advertise? That's sound business!

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

Personal column are you?" he objected.

"Why not?" Editor Lesser raised his head and met Pete Ryan's scowl with a grin.

"But it's screwy," Ryan protested. "I mean, the whole thing's obviously some kind of fake."

"The $4.60 paying for this ad is genuine currency," replied Lesser. "And we must give value received. We have no editorial control over the advertisers in our paper. Ethically, we can't refuse to take an ad, either, unless the message is obscene or offensive."

"Don't you think this ridiculous hoax is offensive?" stormed Pete Ryan. "It's a case for the Better Business Bureau, that's what it is!"

The older man pushed back his chair and shook his head as he confronted Ryan's scowling gaze. Lesser tried hard to suppress a strangely youthful twinkle in his eyes. Clearing his throat, he ventured a reply.

"I hardly think so," he mused, putting his finger-tips together and staring down at the desk.

"If somebody wants to sell his soul, why shouldn't he advertise? That's sound business, you know. It pays to advertise."

"But how can anyone sell their soul?" complained Ryan.

"I don't know," Lesser admitted. "But if he can produce the merchandise when he gets paid for it, there's no hoax involved. Certainly the Better Business Bureau hasn't got an investigator in occultism—"

Lesser halted. A twinkle came into his eyes.

"That's it!" he chuckled. "An investigator in occultism!"

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning *you*, my boy!"

"Me?"

"Exactly." The older man hunched elbows over the desk and talked rapidly. "What do you think those dogs on the city desk will do when they see this item in the bladder? They'll send out a leg man to cover the yarn. Find out who inserted the ad and try to build up a godawful 'human interest' story.

"Well, we'll just beat them to the punch. We'll go out and interview this advertising client. We'll get there first and sew the story up. We'll build a little feature to promote the sale of want ads. We'll get the jump on all of them. We'll—"

"*We?*" interrupted Pete Ryan, skeptically.

"Uh—not exactly. *You* will cover this story."

"You know what you can do with—"

The twinkle disappeared, and Editor Lesser's eyes narrowed. "That's an assignment, Ryan," he snapped.

Young Pete Ryan had been with the Want Ad Department long enough to know when to keep his mouth shut. This was definitely one of these times.

"That's settled, then," his boss went on. "Early edition will hit the street. Better get started tomorrow morning. Meanwhile I'll warn the city desk to lay off—it's our baby for promotion angles."

He burrowed among the papers on his desk.

"Here's the address," he said, holding out a crumpled slip of stationery.

"Be on the spot tomorrow morning—bright, early, and sober. Inquire for the party who inserted this ad. Ask if there have been any answers."

"But suppose they won't tell me anything?" asked Ryan.

"Listen to what wants to be a reporter!" sneered Editor Lesser. "You talk like that and you'll be selling want ads all your life."

HE BIT his lip for a moment. "Here's your angle," he suggested. "Tell the party you're with our sales force, and it's part of the service to see if the ad pulls any results. Keep talking. Get all the story you can.

"Ten to one, it's just some crackpot. But there's a chance we might really dig up a great yarn."

Pete Ryan frowned. "You should talk about crackpots," he grumbled. "Of all the screwball ideas, this takes the cake. Souls for sale!"

"Don't be childish," said Editor Lesser. "Be broadminded, like I am. Why I'd sell my own soul, if I could get a fair offer!"

Pete Ryan faced his boss, grinning. "If you ever insert an ad offering your soul for sale," he declared, "you could be sued for fraud!"

The door closed behind him, just in time

to deflect the inkwell that Editor Lesser hurled at his departing head.

II

PETE RYAN walked up the steps to the door of the big brownstone house. The morning sun beamed, but not Ryan.

"A fine assignment," he muttered. "Oh well, here goes."

His index finger pressed the buzzer. Footsteps pattered along the hall beyond, and he braced himself.

"Bet two bits it's Dracula," he murmured. "Nope, I'm wrong. It's a zombie."

That was hardly an accurate description of the pert, smiling colored maid who opened the door.

"Yes, sir?"

"Pardon me, but I'm looking for the party who inserted an advertisement in yesterday's paper."

"Step in, please."

Ryan stepped along a mahogany-panelled hallway. The maid led him toward a parlor down the hall.

He went in, trying a repress a stare of admiration as he gazed at the handsome interior. The furniture was dated, but it consisted of opulent period pieces that hinted of luxury and good taste. Deep carpeting almost clung to his ankles as he set his feet down firmly and sank into an overstuffed chair.

"No screwball put that ad in," he mused. "Anyone rich enough to afford this stuff deserves to be called eccentric, anyway."

The maid left the room, and Ryan waited. He was getting strangely nervous. There was something definitely suspicious about all this. . . .

There was a moment of silence. Ryan strained his ears for the sound of approaching footsteps. Right now he didn't know *what* to expect. A decadent old millionaire, hoping to play Faust . . . a cynical amateur diabolist . . . a foreign nobleman . . . a degenerate younger son out of Huysmans. . . .

Footsteps.

Ryan braced himself.

A figure appeared in the doorway, and Ryan almost whistled.

The girl was gorgeous. Sheer brunette perfection. Ryan's eyes admiringly catalogued her charms—shimmering black hair, coiled at the nape of a shapely, creamy neck—blue eyes, piquantly slanted—full, sensitive, scarlet lips — a body moulded from the stuff which dreams are made. She was a dream come true.

Young Ryan had had little experience with dreams. Not knowing what to say, he blurted out the thought foremost in his mind.

"You're not the person who inserted that ad about the soul, are you?" he gasped.

"Yes. What do you offer for it?" replied the girl, calmly.

Ryan flushed. "Well—you see—that is, I'm not a prospective purchaser," he stammered.

"Then what is the meaning of this visit?" persisted the girl. The smile had vanished from her face. "Who are you, and how did you find my address? I listed a box number in the ad."

ONCE again Ryan, unprepared for duplicity, replied with the truth. He gave his name and occupation and ran through the little prepared speech about dropping around to see if the ad had "pulled" results. But by the time he had finished, the girl was smiling once more.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I misunderstood you." Her lips shaped a sigh. "But I was hoping you were a genuine customer."

"Then you haven't had any results?" Pete Ryan attempted to assume a professional attitude and interest.

"Well, I've just come from the letter box now," said the girl. "I found letters of protest from two religious organizations, one utterly insane scribble from a fanatic, a note from a would-be wolf, an anonymous threat, and a bottle of Pluto Water from a practical joker."

Ryan grinned. "But honestly now, isn't this whole thing some sort of practical joke on your part?"

"Not at all, Mr. Ryan." The brunette beauty faced him squarely. "I'm deadly serious about this matter."

"But why, Miss—er—"

"Cabot. Lucille Cabot," she answered. She sat down on the sofa and crossed her shapely legs as she lit a cigarette. "Is your

interest in my affairs personal or professional?" she asked.

RYAN shrugged and smiled. "Both, I'm afraid," he answered, softly.

"Well, then. The story's simple, really. Father had a lot of money. Mother died when I was still a baby, and I've spent most of my time in private schools. When I graduated two years ago I came back here to live with Father. Then he passed away. The lawyers went over his estate and found out he'd made bad investments. I was left with the house, a load of debts, and some bad securities."

"But that doesn't explain anything!" Ryan protested. "After all, selling one's soul for the sake of a few debts—if you can sell such a thing as a soul—it's utterly fantastic!"

"Really? Then I'm afraid there's nothing further to discuss. Good day, Mr. Ryan." Her tones were icy.

"Now wait a minute! Don't take it that way," Ryan soothed. "I'm anxious to listen. It's only that all this strikes me as a little strange."

"There's nothing strange about it," said Lucille Cabot. "What can a girl in my position do? I have two choices. I can take a sordid job, for which I am not suited. Not a very pleasant choice, that one. Or I can do my best to find a wealthy husband. And that's all."

"What's wrong with that?" demanded Ryan. "Millions of women face those choices every day. Some of them take their sordid jobs and mould splendid careers out of them. Others marry, and not necessarily for money, either. Strikes me as a pretty good solution. With your schooling and beauty you're better off than most. Why not settle down, make up your mind to—"

"Are you quite done?" Lucille Cabot rose. Her slanted blue eyes flashed fire. Yet her voice was gentle, almost maternal.

"You stupid, petty fool," she sighed. Her tender tones lent incongruity to her words. "Look at me," she said, coming close.

Ryan didn't miss the opportunity.

"No, don't stand there goggling like a sick calf," breathed the girl. "Look into my eyes. Look into my eyes and tell me if you think I was meant to be a clerk, or a stupid housewife."

Ryan stared into cerulean depths. There was something about this girl, something vital and intense, that swept aside all doubts.

She *was* sincere.

"I was destined for greater things," she whispered. "Haven't you ever dreamed of power—riches—reaching the heights?"

Ryan nodded dumbly. There was a tightness in his throat.

"Haven't you ever wanted to reach out and shake down the stars?" Her voice was low, vibrant. "Aren't there ambitions, hidden desires, which if realized are worth the price of the human soul?"

She stood close to him, very close. He could feel her aura, the pulsation of power emanating from her lovely presence.

"In olden times, men conjured up demons and received boons," she said. "I am not a sorceress. I cannot cast spells. I cannot call up the Devil. But perhaps there exists, somewhere, somehow, a man who can. A man with which to bargain. For I swear to you, to gain what I desire, I'd deal with the Devil himself."

"But—" said Mr. Ryan.

The buzzing doorbell cut through his objection. The maid appeared in the hallway.

"Gentleman to see you, Miss Lucille," she said softly.

"Show him in," commanded the girl.

It was as simple as that.

Into the room walked his Satanic Majesty—the Devil.

III

"YOU have a soul to sell?" asked the devil, politely.

"I have."

"I would like to purchase it," he purred.

"What am I offered?"

"What do you desire?"

He came close to Lucille Cabot, but the girl did not flinch. For a long minute he stared directly into her oblique eyes.

"You shall have all that and more," he smiled.

Then Lucille broke. Her composure drained away as she shuddered and drew back from the tall man in black—the man

with the two horned forelocks of raven hair, the pointed mustachio and waxed goatee—the man with the sabre eyebrows, the deep-set, burning red eyes and cleft chin of the Devil.

"Wh-who are you?" she quavered.

"Who do I look like?"

"The Devil himself—but you can't be!"

"Why can't I?"

"There's no such person as the Devil."

He smiled. "If I adopted such a skeptical attitude, I might reply that there is no such thing as a human soul."

Ryan interrupted. "Let's get down to cases," he snapped.

The black eyes turned and fixed upon the young man's face. "Who are you?"

Lucille opened her mouth to intervene, but Ryan stepped forward. "I'm with the sales department of the *Daily Press*," he offered. "I'm representing Miss Cabot in this matter."

The girl turned away, eyes twinkling at his impudence. But she did not stop him.

"Now," said Ryan, "what I want to know is—just who are you and what are your credentials for making an offer to purchase a soul?"

"All right, wise guy," said the stranger. "I'll give. My name's Sam Bolman, but I travel under the stage name of the Mighty Mephisto."

"You're that stage magician?" asked Pete Ryan.

"Yeah, that's right. Now here's the angle. I'm opening a new vaude unit for a tour, see? I see this ad in the paper and I say to myself, here's a hot idea for a publicity tie-up. I'll look up this bozo and hire him as an assistant or something. Now that I find out the party who put in the ad is a pretty dame, it's all the better, get me? We can work up a nifty of a stunt. Miss Cabot we'll announce that you sold your soul to me, understand? Then we go out on tour. I'm willing to pay—"

"Sorry. We're not interested," said Ryan, curtly.

"Hey, wait a minute, fella!"

"We're after bigger game," Ryan explained. "This isn't a gag. This is on the level."

"You mean you actually want to sell a soul to Satan?" breathed the Mighty Mephisto.

"Or to anyone else who will pay the price," said Ryan. "Now, if you happen to know of any way to evoke a demon—"

"I'm getting out of here," announced the magician. "You're stark, raving screwy, that's what you are!"

As the outer door banged shut behind him, Lucille Cabot sighed. Her big eyes clouded as she faced Ryan once more.

"It's hopeless, I'm afraid. They're all alike. Either they're crazy or they think I am. This was my last foolish effort, but I can see it's no use. Now what will I do?"

Pete Ryan grinned. "I've decided that quite a while ago," he announced. "I guess you'll just have to marry me!"

IV

THE funny part of it was that she did It took two weeks—two frantic, fantastic weeks of courtship.

Lucille had ordered him from the house at once, naturally. He called that night, the next day, and the next. He wrote letters, sent flowers, telegrams, and inserted ads in the *Personals* column of the paper. He wined, dined, and wooed her. He did all the usual foolish things.

There were no further repercussions on her advertisement. And before the week was up, the incident of their meeting was almost forgotten; at least by Pete Ryan.

He talked to her very candidly, very sincerely, very earnestly. He told her of his own ambitions to reach the top, but insisted that one must move sanely, serenely. He informed Lucille that she was a little off balance, a little introverted. When Ryan learned of her love for bizarre jewelry, outlandish dress, fantastic music, and odd books, he took her to task.

"We'll get out and live," he promised her. "What you need is a little laughter, a little gayety. You've been alone too much. You brood, get morbid too easily. It isn't right that a beautiful girl like you should have such weird notions."

No YMCA lecturer could have done a better job. Ryan felt as if he had "converted" her when she consented to dine and dance that second week.

The marriage itself was a little more difficult to bring off, but he managed it. One night after they returned to her home, they sat in her father's old library and talked before the dying fire. She snuggled into his arms.

"All right," she sighed. "Right away, then, if you want me."

The usual embrace punctuated the discussion for a while.

"But it must be a civil ceremony," she insisted. "No fuss or bother."

"Anything you say," he agreed. "Just so it's quick. I'll get the license tomorrow. We can be married Saturday. I'll take two weeks off and we'll go south for the honeymoon."

He rose, radiant of eye, and paced the floor in growing enthusiasm and excitement.

Abruptly he halted before bookshelves.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"Why, just some of father's old books."

Ryan stared at the brown and black-backed tomes. Thick, ponderous volumes. Iron-hasped books with yellowed, crumbling pages. Thick, illuminated Gothic texts. Titles in Greek and Latin.

"Demonalatra," he read. *"Ye Complete Grimoires."*

He stared at her. "I thought you said you didn't have any of these books?" he said. "This stuff deals with sorcery, doesn't it? Black magic?"

"Oh, darling, those books are no good. Father made a hobby of collecting such items. But it's all nonsense. I admit that's where I got the idea for inserting the ad, though."

He grasped her slim shoulders with ruthless fingers. He stared deeply into her slanted blue eyes.

"Promise me one thing," he whispered. "I don't know much about all this. I'm not asking you to tell me. But you must promise me this much—never try to sell your soul to the Devil or anyone or thing else."

"I promise."

She offered the red seal of her lips. And Ryan knew she told the truth, and was content. And so they were married and—

SATURDAY night was hectic. The afternoon wedding was followed by a dinner. Editor Lesser had insisted on that, and Lucille bore it with good grace. After all, at ten they would be departing on the train for New Orleans. She knew how much it meant to Ryan to display her before his boss and his friends. She sparkled at dinner.

At eight-thirty they broke away.

"We must dash for the house," she said. "I've got to change and finish packing."

They dashed.

It was a rather wavering dash on Pete Ryan's part. There had been champagne at dinner, and Scotch and soda had played a part in the celebration.

Lucille, he noticed, was a little "high" herself. But her radiance was of the spirit rather than "spirits."

They clung to each other in the hall as they entered the house.

"Now I must get busy," Lucille told him.

"Wait—let's have a drink first," Ryan suggested.

"No, darling. There isn't time. I'll pack. If I'm done promptly we'll have one together before we leave."

He pouted a bit. She kissed the pout. "Why don't you sit down here?" she suggested. "Pour yourself some Scotch. I'll be down in a jiffy."

Ryan sat down and poured. Then he poured again. The stuff was potent. Potent enough to make him whimsical.

"I'll sneak up and surprise her," he decided.

He tiptoed up the stairs. The light burned in her room and he headed down the hall.

"Confound it," he muttered. "I never did believe all those gags about women taking so long to dress. Guess I'm in for it."

Cautiously, he poked his head around the bedroom door.

Lucille Cabot was not dressing.

She stood stark naked in the shadow of a single lamp. Her magnificently moulded body was debased in an attitude of adoration on the floor.

The rug had been carefully rolled back. The polished surface of the floor held strange markings in green chalk. Triangles, and a pentagram.

There was an acrid odor of incense in the room, commingled with a musty, sour smell of death. It was hot in the wavering shadows.

THE shadows were everywhere. They concealed the furniture, the prosaic outlines of the walls. They played weird tricks with normal vision.

It seemed to Ryan, as he gaped, that he saw nothing but the naked woman, the shining green design, and the shadows. The weaving, growing shadows. The shadows that crept and crouched like black beasts, moving as if in response to the summons from the scarlet lips of the nude girl.

For she was chanting, chanting—chanting into the darkness and the shadows. Chanting a summons.

Ryan opened his mouth to speak, then let it hang.

For as he watched, the summons were *answered*.

There was a flicker, elusive as heat lightning—just a flicker that filled the room with a momentary glare. And then the shadows on the wall *congealed*. Congealed into a Presence.

Ryan didn't see it with his eyes. His mind perceived it, tried to encompass the hideous, distorted outline of that ebony shape that emerged, squatting, and thrust a leering muzzle into the light. The thing was not meant to be seen, save with the eye of dreams.

Yet it squatted there, and the girl raised her eyes and praised it in a shrill voice, calling it by a name that Ryan dared not hear. And it moved closer to her, and Ryan saw its jaws part as it mewed and mewed—

He moved, then. He forced himself into the room. Every step was agony, but he moved. And then he stood before her, trying to keep his physical balance, his mental balance.

"Lucille," he muttered. "You're—a—"

He couldn't say it. But she said it for him, with a smile.

"A sorceress. Yes. And my father practised the mantic arts, and now you know."

She spoke rapidly, without defiance. There was nothing but candor in her voice, and a curious amusement.

"But your promise," muttered Ryan, his world reeling. "You made me a promise. A promise that you would never sell your soul."

"Oh, that." She stepped close, and the witchery of her presence encompassed him. "But I am keeping that promise," she whispered, softly.

"Then why—this—?" He dared say no more, dare not indicate the thing that waited with them in that tiny room.

She ignored him and went on swiftly. "Besides, you silly boy, I never had any intention of selling my soul. If you recall the way I worded the ad in the paper, I merely said that I would have *a* soul for sale. And I have, now."

Ryan turned. The Presence blocked the doorway, and he saw Lucille nod toward it quickly. As he stood there, powerless to scream or move, the black horror glided swiftly toward him—and then at last, Ryan understood whose soul was for sale.

The Mirror

By ***CHARLES KING***

"IT . . . IT'S impossible."

His concentration was so great that he didn't know he had spoken aloud. He closed one eye, entirely, then opened it, slowly. Hoping against hope, he then worked his tongue into a corner of his cheek and rotated it about. He watched. Stared. A pulse was drumming fiercely in his forehead as he backed away from the mirror.

He had first noticed it a short time ago;

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

It was only a week ago that his reflection had abruptly rebelled

seven days to be exact. It is logical to suppose that he would have known of it sooner if he had been a vainer man. Most certainly, then, he would have looked into mirrors a great deal oftener.

But Jay Swarz was a mild man; a meek man; a man completely devoid of ego. He wore his habits the way he wore his clothes ...soberly. He did not sin; he would not. He did not cheat; he could not. Three drinks before dinner and his reactions unmistakenly informed him that he'd had enough. He was like that.

Once again he shot a covert glance at the mirror. There it was ... plain to see. ...

Jay Swarz had been brought up properly. But that is an expression that has lost its true meaning. To speak with exactitude, it is better to say that he had been brought up *primly*.

In an era where modesty was considerably more than a fetish; an era where the most innocuous words called down condemnation upon the luckless user, Jay Swarz' family proudly outdid themselves in righteous self-effacement.

Completely cloaked with the mantle of selflessness . . . or so they insisted . . . they balanced themselves with practiced step upon the tightrope of virtue. No matter the season, their bodies were swathed in layer upon layer of raiment. Indoors, their comportment was such as to assure them front-row seats in the heavenly orchestra of harpists . . . or so they insisted.

Jay had never been one to rebel. He was the sort born to accept orders unquestioningly. If, even in the privacy of one's room, it was immodest and wrong to undress before dousing the lights, he carefully put out the lights before removing his breeches. His parents had instructed him. He obeyed them. If he had to go to the lavatory it would never do to say so. That would have been grievously shocking. Any simple excuse to leave the room was acceptable under those conditions ... but never the immodest truth.

But all these bugaboos paled before the one strict immutable rule that pervaded the Swarz household. Serving the interests of virtue, one might do everything in one's power ... and then fail. How? By looking, smiling at, daring to admire one's reflected form in a mirror. The human form was a debased thing of evil that only served to lead its owner off the garden path. Thus, logically, it was a thing to remain unseen; avoided. Jay's Father used it for shaving. That was its purpose.

ONE of Jay's most memorable recollections was the time that he had been caught. He'd lost a tooth, as boys will, and was entirely engrossed in exploring the bloody cavity with an inquisitive finger. The mirror helped a great deal as he probed and poked . . . until . . .

"Jay!"

He swerved, nearly upsetting himself, and paled. "Yes, Father?"

"Ungodly brat! You were lasciviously admiring yourself!"

"I ... I don't understand, Father."

"Do not trifle with me. I have explained the sin often enough."

"It was the big word I didn't understand. And, honest, I was just fooling . . ."

Which is as far as Jay got. His gasp was cut off as a gnarled hand jerked at the back of his collar. The shaving strop was seized, raised aloft, then brought down with a singing swish. Jay's cry of pain suffered the same brief span that his gasp had lasted. The steadily flailing strip of leather effectively stifled everything but an agonized wish for death. Again and again it rose and fell. The regularity was monotonous. The pain eventually indescribable.

Things, after a while, resolved into a whirling world of unbelieved torture. Again and again rose the leather flail ... down and down it beat against the semi-conscious jerking form that was Jay Swarz. Jay finally fainted. ...

A graphic experience is forever etched upon the consciousness of a child. Jay never forgot that beating. It had the constant impact of a sledge-hammer swung against a huge brazen gong. The reverberations went on and on and on. ...

Jay grew older and finally left home to establish his own way in the world. He trod in minor paths. Luckier than most men, he never was troubled by an all-consuming ambition. The highways for others—the byways for him. A small job; a small room; these quite comfortably fitted his small desires.

His position with a large insurance com-

pany was safe and steady. Nobody resents a man who doesn't covet positions that aren't better than his; nobody wields an economic knife against a man who is supremely satisfied to trudge a timeless treadmill.

He was accepted with the same careless complacence that is usually associated with a slightly worn piece of office furniture; and he was considered very much as devoid of personality or hidden depth.

But they would have been surprised.

He *did* have a secret.

Jay Swarz was still afraid of mirrors.

Psychologically conditioned by the ultra-stern conditions of his youth, his fear never diminished. To the contrary, it fed upon itself and grew constantly. Morbidly. A man incapable of making living enemies, he found himself in the anomalous position of having an inanimate foe. He used mirrors as sparingly as it was humanly possible. Brushing his teeth and washing his face were easy. No ordeal there. But shaving was a shuddering time of terror that had to be agonized through every morning.

And now . . .

"It's impossible!"

But it *was* possible.

It was there . . . plain to see . . . plain to see.

Even as his eyes clung to the mirror, and his mouth was drawn thin with horror, his reflection was laughing at him. His hand stole to his face . . . his reflected hand didn't. There were new lines in his face, but his mirrored face was full and untroubled. His eyelids twitched uncontrollably, but not so in the likeness that was flung back at him. Horribly, *silently,* the face in the mirror kept laughing and laughing.

It had been a week ago that he had first noticed. A week ago that his reflection had rebelled. A week ago that his mirrored personality had begun defying him. It might have begun sooner. He hadn't noticed . . . until . . .

Until one morning it had winked obscenely at him. And ever since . . . ever

HE REMEMBERED, now, the ancient Germanic legend of the man who had met his double. It had been wringing its hands. Death. He fought himself, but his eyes shot toward his reflection. It was grinning . . . wringing its hands. . . .

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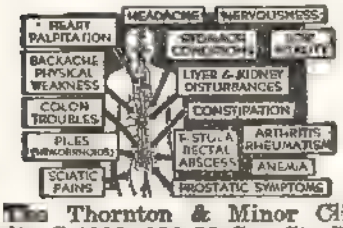

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The psychiatrist wielded his pen with sure, broad strokes. A man untroubled by personal ghosts. A man who slew the morbid fancies and terrorizing thoughts of others. He scratched a last notation, his lips forming the inaudible words "psychosis... auto-suggestion...."

Jay squirmed forward in his chair as the psychiatrist leaned back and studied him.

"Does... does it mean I am crazy?"

The other's full, rich, carefully practiced tones fell upon Jay Swarz like a protective benediction: "No. Absolutely not. You are as sane as... well, as I am." This last accompanied by a resonant chuckle.

"Then the thing I see can't hurt me?"

"It is impossible for it to hurt you. Impossible, because you do *not* see it."

"But Doctor—"

"Please. A moment." Well-manicured fingers interlaced themselves across a well-padded stomach. "From what you have told me, you are a man pursued by phantoms. It is not your fault, Mr. Swarz. You have related how your boyhood was completely dominated by a thorough abnegation of healthy emotion. No outlets. No outlets at all. Well, sir, what is the result?"

"What?"

"As you grew older, Mr. Swarz, you cast off the narrow outlook with which you were most effectively swaddled. You didn't know it, but you did. And, due to the inexorable law of nature, you began to think for yourself. That, of course, brought its... er... problems."

"I... don't understand."

"Let us put it this way. A man who has been perishing of thirst will not allow logic to stand in his way when he is confronted with plenteous water. He will drink and drink until he is uncomfortably sated. If undeterred he will become rather sick. You, Mr. Swarz, are that thirsty man."

"I... see...."

"Exactly. You had a thirst for normalcy. It was, during your childhood, consistently denied to you. You left home and found yourself with an all-consuming thirst for being a healthy ego... for being natural. You follow me."

It wasn't a question, but Jay Swarz felt constrained to answer "Yes." It was getting so clear now, so normally explainable, that

he had to show his improvement by joining in, and approving of, the logical explanation.

"Well, sir, you overdid yourself. The abrupt change to a normal way of living, and acting, stirred up half-forgotten vistas of your unfortunate youth. Subconsciously, that is. Once again you were being threatened with unfair punishment. Inwardly, of course. You probably never even perceived . . . suspected. The first sign was the product of an overworked—though, to you, unsuspected—imagination. The fear complex. The worry over being hideously punished—as you told me you were—because you were doing something that is unalterably natural."

"But, Doctor, my remaining fear of mirrors. . . ."

"You are *not* afraid."

"I . . ."

"Mr. Swarz. Believe me. You only *think* you are afraid. That is why you have been avoiding mirrors with such careful conscientiousness these past few years. As the snake struggles to shed its skin, so are you struggling. And—forgive the comparison—as the reptile finally emerges in new, shining armor, so are you emerging."

"Then, what shall I do?"

"Face your phantom, Mr. Swarz. Defy it. Gaze into your mirror steadily—without fear. Your clouded imagination will be cleared by the calm, cooling breezes of reason."

"L-look into my mirror steadily?"

"Precisely. Drive out the false visions that have been plaguing you so unfairly. Once gone they will never return. On that I stake my reputation."

IT WAS a new Jay Swarz who turned the key of his small apartment. It was a new Jay Swarz that tossed his coat onto his bed. It was something he had wanted to do all his life, a life given to circumspectly genuflecting to all the hallowed proprieties. That was over. Done. He was a snake shedding its dull skin for a brighter one . . . a butterfly emerging in innocent glory from its dull chrysalis . . . *a man.*

He turned toward the bathroom. He couldn't help the feeling of aversion . . . of fear. . . .

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Hand upon the door . . . fear . . . twist the knob . . . no . . . think . . . psychiatrist's advice . . . a learned man . . . helps people who need guidance . . . twist the knob . . . try . . . sweat forming on a corrugated forehead . . . twist the knob . . . everything explained . . . logically . . . exactly . . . mathematically . . . truthfully . . . that last very important . . . *twist the knob. . . .*

And he was inside.

Walk up to the mirror . . . boldly . . . stare steadily . . . unafraid . . . blot out the false phantoms . . . *do it.* It's easy . . . one leg before the other . . . go ahead . . . hesitation only hurts . . . makes things harder . . . foolish . . . nothing to be worried about . . . all carefully explained . . . habits of a lifetime . . . lurking . . . unfair . . . no substance . . . all explained . . . figments . . . palpably worthy of derision . . . go ahead. . . .

And he was before the mirror.

Open your eyes . . . stare . . . steadily . . . open your eyes . . . nothing can hurt you . . . it will help . . . teach you the truth . . . help you . . . open broad lanes . . . to happines. . . . wipe out the past . . . the gray past . . . the punishing past . . . open your eyes . . . see the new world . . . *your* world . . . *open your eyes. . . .*

And he opened his eyes.

His reflection . . . nothing to worry about . . . it looked at him . . . as he looked at it . . . calm . . . both calm . . . as it should be . . . expressions the same . . . as they should be . . . psychiatrist right . . . as he should be . . . learned man . . . wise man . . . helpful man . . . good advice . . . best advice . . go ahead . . . stare at it . . . staring . . . pride . . . strength . . . new feeling of . . . of . . . *no! Can't! be.* Impossible. Psychiatrist said no . . . learned man . . . wise man . . . look again. . . . *NO!* Reflection . . . laughing . . . silently . . . utterly impossible . . . wise man said so . . . wealth of experience . . . can't be wrong . . . good advice . . . best advice . . . heed it . . . heed it . . . stare at reflection . . . glare at reflection . . . don't give up . . . must win . . . must win . . . don't give up . . . stare . . . gl— . . .

And he screamed. And he screamed.

He caught himself. Lurched out of the bathroom.

This was no time to give way to disordered, mental stabs. More than evident that his ancient enemy was weakening; em-

ploying last hopeless trickery. This was triumph . . . triumph.

Get a bit of help. Nothing shameful about using all the means at one's disposal to rid one's self of a dying enemy. Nothing to do with one's manliness. The enemy must be destroyed.

That is the only important thing.

ANSWERING the telephone call, the psychiatrist finally arrived. A bit put out because he'd been disturbed at his meal; but cloaking his irritation and impatience with the thought of adding a substantial amount to an already padded bill.

"Look, Doctor . . . the mirror."

"What about it?"

"Can't you see?"

"No."

"You *can't?*"

"All I see is that you have a reflection . . . which is as it should be."

"But it reacts differently. That is why I called you. . . ."

"I don't understand."

"Don't you see? It—my enemy—is still there. However, I am not afraid. It is a figment. I know it. You told me so. But it is there . . . to be destroyed. Isn't that progress?"

The psychiatrist backing up . . . professionally polite . . . words . . . words that have no meaning . . . professional . . . backing to the door . . . understanding . . . *understanding.*

"I'm sorry I troubled you, sir. It was nothing. Nothing at all."

"Quite all right, Mr. Swarz. Just take my advice. Don't be afraid . . . don't be afraid . . ." and he was gone.

Failure! The psychiatrist had lied. Evident. He had seen it too. Wouldn't admit it. Have to help one's self. The only way . . . use any means. . . .

Any means.

Out with logic. Forswear what is fallaciously taught. Seek that which can *really* help. Seek that which is ridiculed and mocked . . . but secretly feared. Seek the strange powers that all gibe at . . . because the *true* answer is there . . . for the asking. . . .

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And old bookshop . . . and old man . . . incredibly old . . . nodding . . . understanding . . . tottering to an inner room . . . a book . . . musty . . . ancient . . . refusal of payment . . . smiling. . . .

JAY SWARZ entered his apartment. He opened the book and studied. He smiled. It was all so easy. How much simpler if he had done this first. He read on. . . .

There was the diagram to chalk upon the floor. He drew it. There were the multi-syllabled invocations to intone. He intoned them. There were the careful passes through the air . . . the repetition of certain odd phrases . . . the lit match that must scorch his fingertips. . . .

And, as it must be, the crouching shape was there. Motionless. The shape that would rid him of the rebellious reflection in the mirror. The shape that would take the horror out of his life. It would exact a tribute. That was to be expected.

Jay Swarz was happy. Truly happy. He cast a sidelong glance at his mirrored reflection. *Could it be?* Yes. It was already losing its shape . . . becoming tenuous . . . transparent . . . wearing a look that Jay knew . . . *knew* . . . was one of helpless pleading. No time for mercy . . . too many years of subjugation . . . destroy . . . without conscience destroy . . . the reflection of him was wavering . . . almost gone . . . fighting . . . hopelessly . . . going . . . *gone*. . . .

And the crouched figure stirred itself. Slowly unbent. Looked up for the first time.

Jay Swarz threw a frantic look at his mirror. No reflection. No reflection at all. Blank. *Blank.*

The figure straightened and stepped over the chalked lines. It was going to exact its tribute. Jay Swarz knew this.

He also knew that he had incarnated his double . . . brought it to life . . . it was wringing its hands . . . hands which suddenly swooped to Jay Swarz' throat.

He knew so many things . . . too late.

The Shining Land Found Again

ALTHOUGH "Lost Elysium" in this number is a sequel to "The Shining Land" (WEIRD TALES, May, 1945) author Edmond Hamilton writes us that he had no thought of a follow-up yarn when he wrote that first novelette.

"But after it appeared," Hamilton says, "I began to realize how many interesting possibilities there were for a second yarn."

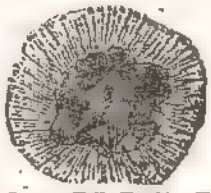
Herewith are some further notes on the story, forwarded by Edmond Hamilton:

"Lost Elysium," like "The Shining Land," had its source in my long interest in Celtic mythology. Years ago I stumbled on Rolleston's "Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race," in my estimation still the best popular account, and ever since then have read everything I could find on this fascinating subject.

It has always seemed to me that the Celtic tales have more imaginative splendor than any other mythology. They do not have the graceful perfection of the Greek legends, not the dark, grim power of the great Norse saga of the doomed Aesir, but in sheer, magic beauty they are incomparable.

Perhaps the most remarkable and distinctive feature of Celtic mythology is the predominance of their strange conception of an Otherworld or Elysium, distinct from the ordinary Earth. It was called Tir Sorcha, or the Shining Land, but was also called Tir nan Og, the Land of Youth, or Tir n'Aill, the Other World.

It was not primarily, like the Greek Elysium, an abode of the dead. Rather it was conceived as a realm of wondrous, golden beauty that existed somewhere in the West-



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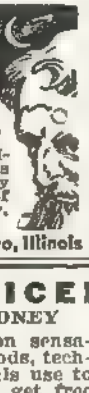

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ern Ocean but could not be seen by ordinary eyes because it was detached magically from our Earth. It was persistently pictured as consisting of many islands, and the Celts believed that more than one adventurer had managed to enter it and wander through the enchanted archipelago. "The Voyage of Bran" and the "Voyage of Maledune" are accounts of such adventures, the latter having been turned into a fine poem by Tennyson.

The great Cuchulain, hero of the later Ultonian myths, also entered this Elysium and there met and loved Fand, one of the great figures of the superhuman Tuatha race. But the Tuatha, more correctly the Tuatha de Dannan, had themselves previously invaded Earth in the fourth of the five great invasions listed by Celtic chronology, and had here fought and defeated the dark and evil Fomorians who were the most hated and dreaded of pre-human races.

From all this dramatic material, which I must emphasize is here only briefly summarized and has many variant versions, I tried to select those incidents and characters which could be woven into a story that would illustrate the richness of the old Celtic lore without doing too much violence to its traditions.

It may be of interest to note that one of the most famous of 20th Century British composers, Arnold Bax, composed a beautiful symphonic tone-poem which pictures the golden Elysium of the Celts. It is called "The Garden of Fand."

I should also add, perhaps, for those who may wish to explore this fascinating subject further, that beside Rolleston's fine popular book there are standard works by Rhys, Leahy, Joyce and many others. There is also a vast deal of material on every aspect of

READERS' VOTE

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Here's a list of eight stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza New York City 20, N. Y.

this subject in the standard encyclopediae of religion and folk-lore.

Edmond Hamilton.

Word from Stanton Coblentz

WE WERE interested to receive an announcement from Stanton A. Coblentz the other day concerning a new book of his scheduled for publication this Fall. The title is "When The Birds Fly South" and it is put out by The Wings Press. Stanton Coblentz, well-known as a poet, critic and author whose work has appeared both here and in England, is an old friend of ours and of WEIRD TALES readers. He was kind enough to give us this little peek into his forthcoming book.

This novel, "When The Birds Fly South," scheduled for publication in September, is one for the reader who has tired of modern realism, and wishes a story of romance, mystery and wonder, a story that only a poet could have written. It is a tale of love and adventure among the mountains of Afghanistan, a tale dominated by the weird and inscrutable forces of the east, and by an overtowering destiny personified in Yulada, the great stone woman on the peak. It is also the tale of Dan Prescott, a lost member of an American geological expedition, who crosses "The Mountain of Vanished Men" to pass his days among the Ibandru, a quaint mountain people that disappear mysteriously each year "when the birds fly south." And it is likewise the tale of the love of Prescott and dark-eyed, auburn-haired Yasma, an impetuous young daughter of the tribe.

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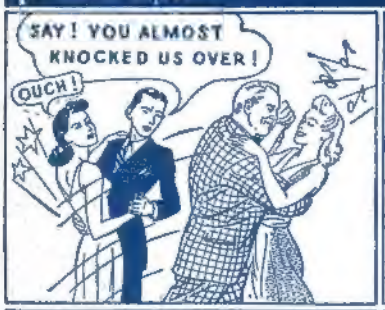

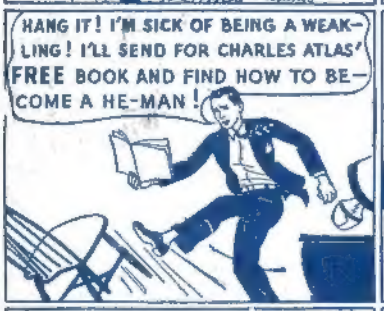

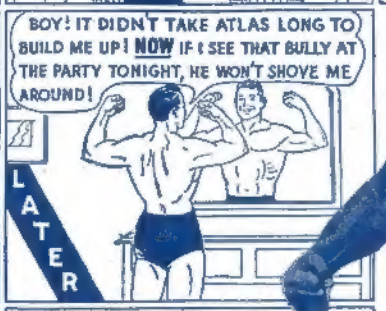

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